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NANCY

RHODA BROUGHTON

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NANCY.

A Novel.

BY

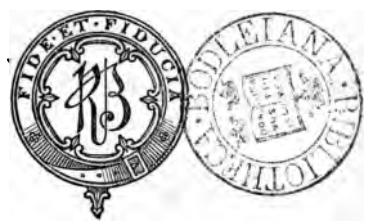
RHODA BROUGHTON,

AUTHOR OF "RED AS A ROSE IS SHE," "GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART," ETC., ETC.

"As thro' the land at eve we went,
And pluck'd the ripened ears,
We fell out, my wife and I,
O we fell out I know not why,
And kissed again with tears."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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1873.

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251. b. 40.

TO

MRS. ANDREW SPOTTISWOODE

This Story is Addressed,

AS A SLIGHT AND INADEQUATE PROOF

OF HEARTY LOVE

AND GRATITUDE FOR

UNFAILING KINDNESS

AND UNFLAGGING SYMPATHY.

NANCY.

CHAPTER I.

"PUT into a small preserving pan three ounces of fresh butter, and as soon as it is just melted, add one pound of brown sugar of moderate quality——"

"Not moderate—the browner the better," interpolates Algy.

"Cannot say I agree with you. I hate brown sugar—filthy stuff!" says Bobby contradictiously.

"Not half so *filthy* as white, if you come to that," retorts Algy loftily, looking up

from the lemon he is grating to extinguish his brother. "They clear white sugar with bullock's——"

"Keep these stirred gently over a clear fire for about fifteen minutes," interrupt I, beginning to read again very fast, in a loud, dull recitative, to hinder further argument, "or until a little of the mixture dipped into cold water breaks clear between the teeth without sticking to them. When it is boiled to this point it must be poured out immediately or it will burn."

Having galloped jovially along, scorning stops, I here pause out of breath. We are a large family, we Greys, and we are *all* making toffee. Yes, every one of us. It would take all the fingers of one hand, and the thumb of the other, to count us, oh reader. Six! Yes, six. A Frenchman might well hold up his hands in astonied horror at the insane prolificness—the foolhardy fertility of British householders. We

come very *improbably* close together, except Tou Tou, who was an after-thought. There are no two of us, I am proud to say, exactly simultaneous, but we have come tumbling on each other's heels into the world in so hot a hurry that we evidently expected to find it a pleasant place when we get there. Perhaps we do—perhaps we do not: friends, you will hear and judge for yourselves.

A few years ago, when we were little, people used to say that we were quite a pretty sight, like little steps one above another. We are big steps now, and no one any longer hazards the suggestion of our being pretty. On the other hand, nobody denies that we are each as well furnished with legs, arms, and other etceteras, as our neighbours, nor can affirm that we are notably more deficient in wits than those of our friends who have arrived in twos and threes.

We are in the school-room, the big bare school-room, that has seen us all—that is still seeing some of us—unwillingly dragged, and painfully goaded up the steep slopes of book learning. Outside, the March wind is roughly hustling the dry brown trees, and pinching the diffident green shoots, while the round and rayless sun of late afternoon is staring from behind the elm twigs in at the long maps on the wall, in at the high chairs—tall of back, cruelly tiny of seat, off whose rungs we have kicked all the paint—in at the green baize table, richly freaked with ink-splashes. Hardly less red than the sun's are our burnt faces, gathered about the fire.

This fire has no flame—only a glowing, ruddy heart, on which the bright brass saucepan sits; and, kneeling before it, stirring the mess with a long iron spoon, is Barbara. Algy, as I have before remarked, is grating a lemon. Bobby is buttering

soup plates. The Brat—the Brat always takes his ease if he can, is peeling almonds, fishing delicately for them in a cup of hot water with his finger and thumb; and I, Nancy, am reading aloud the receipt at the top of my voice, out of a greasy, dogs'-eared cookery-book, which, since it came into our hands, has been the innocent father of many a hideous compound. Tou Tou alone, in consideration of her youth, is allowed to be a spectator. She sits on the edge of the table, swinging her thin legs, and kicking her feet together.

Certainly we deteriorate in looks as we go downwards. In Barbara we made an excellent start: few families a better one, though we say it that should not. Although in Algy there was a slight falling off, it was not much to complain of. But I am sensibly uglier than Algy—(as indeed he has, on several occasions, dispassionately remarked to me); the Brat than me;

Bobby than the Brat; and so steadily on, till we reach our nadir of unhandsomeness in Tou Tou. Tou Tou is our climax, and we confidently defy our neighbours and acquaintances to outdo her.

Hapless young Tou Tou! made up of the thinnest legs, the widest mouth, the invisiblest nose, and over visiblest ears that ever went to the composition of a child of twelve years.

"Keep stirring always! You must take care that it does not stick to the bottom!" say I, closing the receipt-book, and speaking on my own account; but still as one having authority.

"All very well to say 'Keep stirring always,'" answers Barbara, turning round a face unavoidably pretty, even though at the present moment deeply flame-coloured; eyes still sweetly laughing with gay good humour, even though half burnt out of her head, to answer me; "but

if you had been stirring as long as I have, you would wonder that you had any arm left to stir with, however feebly. Here, one of you boys, take a turn! You Brat, you never do anything for your living!"

The Brat complies, though not with eagerness. They change occupations: the Brat stirs, and she fishes for almonds. Ten minutes pass: the toffee is done, and what is more it really is toffee. The upshot of our cookery is in general so startlingly indifferent from what we had intended, that the result in the present case takes us by surprise. We all prove practically that in the words of the receipt-book, it "breaks clear between the teeth without sticking to them." It is poured into Bobby's soup plate, and we have thrown up the window sashes, and set it on the ledge to cool. The searching wind blows in dry and biting. Now it is rushing in a violent current

through the room, for the door has opened. Mother enters.

"To what may we attribute the honour of this visit?" says Algy, turning away from the window to meet her, and setting her a chair. Bobby gives her a kiss, and the Brat a lump of toffee, concerning which it would be invidious to predicate which were the stickier; so exceedingly adhesive are both.

"Your father says—" begins she, sitting down. She is interrupted by a loud and universal groan.

"Says what? Something unpleasant of course, who is it now? Who has done anything now? I do hope it is the Brat," cries Bobby, viciously; "it is quite his turn: he has been good boy of the family for the last week."

"I daresay it is," replies the Brat resignedly, "one can't expect such prosperity as mine to last for ever."

"Of course it is *I*," says Algy rather bitterly, "it is always I. I have never been good boy since I was ploughed; and, please God, I never will be again."

"But what is it? what is it? About how bad is it? Is it to be one of our worst rows?"

We are all speaking together at the top of our voices; indeed we rarely employ a lower key.

"It is no one; no one has done anything," replies mother, when, at last, we allow her to make herself heard; "only your father sends you a message that as Sir Roger Tempest is coming here to-day, he hopes you will make less noise this evening in here than you did last night: he says he could hardly hear the sound of his own voice."

"Ahem!" "Very likely!" "I dare say!" in different tones of angry incredulity.

"He begs you to see that the swing-

door is shut, as he does not wish his friend to imagine that he keeps a private Lunatic Asylum."

A universal snort of indignation.

"If we are Bedlamites, we know who made us so. We will tell old Roger if he asks," etc.

"For my part," say I, resolutely pinching my lips together as I kneel on the carpet, and violently hammer the now cold and hard toffee with the handle of the poker, which in its day has been put to many uses vile, "I can tell you that I shall not dine with you to-night: I should infallibly say something to father—something unfortunate—I feel it rising; and it would be unseemly to have one of our émeutes before this old gentleman, would not it?"

"They are nice breezy things when you are used to them," says Barbara, laughing; "but one requires to be brought up to them."

"Do not you dine either, Brat," say I, looking up, and waving the poker with suave command at him, "and we will broil bones for tea, and roast potatoes on the shovel."

"Some of you must dine," says poor mother, rather wearily, "or your father—"

"He cannot complain if we send our two specimen ones," say I, again looking up, and indicating Barbara and Algy with my weapon, "our sample figs: if Sir Robert—Sir Robin—Sir Roger—what is he?—does not see the rest of us, he may perhaps imagine that we are all equally presentable, which would be more to your credit, mother, than if Bobby and Tou Tou and I were to be submitted to the poor old thing's notice."

Mother looks rather at sea.

"What are you talking about? What poor old thing? Oh! I understand."

"He will have to see us," says Tou

Tou, rather lugubriously, "he cannot help it—at prayers."

Tou Tou has descended from the table, and is standing propped against mother's knee, twisting one leg with ingenious grace round the other.

"Bless your heart," says the Brat, comfortingly, "he will never find out that we are there: do you suppose that his blear old eyes will see all across that big room, economically lit up by one pair of candles?"

Mother smiles.

"Wait till you see whether he has blear eyes!"

"He must be pretty ancient," says Algy, in all the insolence of twenty, leaning his flat back against the mantelshelf, "as he was at school with father."

"Father has not blear eyes," remarks Bobby, dryly. "Would God he had! For then perhaps he would not see our little

vices quite so clearly with them as he does."

"But then father has not been in India," retorts Algy, stretching. "India plays the deuce with one's organs and appurtenances."

"I wish you joy of him," say I, rising flushed and untidy from my knees, having successfully smashed the toffee into little bits; "from soup to walnuts, you will have to undergo a ceaseless tyranny of tales about Kitmaghars and dak bungalows and Choto Hazery. Which of us has not suffered in our day from the horrible monotony of ideas of an old Indian?"

"Never you mind, Barbara!" cries the Brat, giving her a sounding brotherly pat on the back. "Pay no attention to her."

"'What great events from trivial causes spring!' as the poet says: you may live to bless the day that old Roger crossed our doors."

"As how?" says Barbara, laughing, and rocking herself backwards and forwards in a veteran American rocking-chair, which, at different periods of our history, has served most of us the dirty turn of tipping us over, and presenting us reversed to the eyes of our family.

"Never you mind," repeats the Brat, oracularly: "truth is stranger than fiction! odd things happen: I read in the paper the other day of a man who pulled up the window for an old woman in the train, and she died at once—I do not mean on the spot but very soon after, and when she died—listen, please, all of you—" (speaking very slowly and impressively)—"she left him *two thousand pounds* a year."

"I wish I saw the application," answers Barbara, still rocking and sighing.

"Mind that you set a stool for his gouty foot,' says Algy, feeling for his faint mou-

stache, "and run and search for his spectacle-case, when he has mislaid it."

"Seriously," say I, "what a grand thing it would be for the family if he were to adopt you, Barbara."

"Or me," suggests the Brat, standing before the fire with his coat-tails under his arm. "Why not *me?* My manners to the aged are always considered particularly happy."

"Here he is!" cries Tou Tou from the window, whither she has retired, and now stands, like a heron, on one leg, leaning her elbow on the sill. "Here is the dog-cart turning the corner!"

We all make a rush to the casement.

"Yes, there he is! sure enough! our future benefactor!" says Algy, looking over the rest of our heads, and making a counterfeit greeting, "Welcome, welcome, good old man!"

"And father, all affability, pointing out the lions," supplements Bobby.

We laugh grimly.

"But who is it he has in the fly?" say I, as a second vehicle follows the first. "His harem, I suppose! half a dozen old Wampoos."

"His valet, to be sure," replies the Brat, chidingly, "with his stays, and his evening wig, and the calves of his legs."

CHAPTER II.

THE wind is even colder than it was, stronger and more withering now that the sun's faint warmth is withdrawn, and that the small and chilly stars possess the sky. Nevertheless, both the school-room windows are open. We are all huddled shivering round the hearth, yet no one talks of closing them. The fact is that amateur cooking, though a graceful accomplishment, has its penalties, and that at the present moment the smell of broiled bones and fried potatoes that fills our place of learning is something appalling. Why may not it

penetrate beneath the swing-door, through the passages, and reach the drawing-room? Such a thing has happened once or twice before. At the bare thought we all quake. I am in the pleasant situation, just at present, of owning a chilled body and a blazing face.

Chiefest among the cooks have I been, and now I am sitting trying to fan my red cheeks and redder nose, with the back of an old atlas, gutted in some ancient broil, trying, in deference to Sir Roger, to cool down my appearance a little against prayer time. Alas! that epoch is nearer than I think. Ting! tang! the loud bell is ringing through the house. My hair is loosened and tumbled with stooping over the fire, and I have burnt a hole right in the fore front of my gown, by letting a hot cinder fall from the grate upon it. There is, however, now no time to repair these dilapidations. We issue from our lair, and en route meet

the long string of servants filing from their distant regions. How is it that the cook's face is so much, *much* less red than mine? Prayers are held in the justicing room, and thither we are all repairing. The accustomed scene bursts on my eye. At one end the long straight row of the servants, immovably devout, staring at the wall, with their backs to us. In the middle of the room, facing them, father kneeling upon a chair with his hands clenched, and his eyes closed, repeating the church prayers, as if he were rather angry with them than otherwise. Mother, kneeling on the carpet beside him, like the faithful, ruffed, and farthingaled wife on a fifteenth century tomb. Behind them, again, at some little distance, we and our visitor. With the best will in the world to do so, I can get but a meagre view of the latter. The room is altogether rather dark, it being one of our manners and customs not to throw much light on

prayers, and he has chosen the darkest corner of it. I only vaguely see the outline of a kneeling figure, evidently neither bulky nor obese, of a flat back and vigorous shoulders. His face is generally hidden in his hands, but once or twice he lifts it to scan the proportions of my late grandfather's preposterously fat cob, whose portrait hangs on the wall above his head.

There is no doubt that on some days the devil reigns with a more potent sway over people than on others. To-night he has certainly entered into the boys. He often does a little, but this evening he is holding a great and mighty carnival amongst them. While father's strong hard voice vibrates in a loud, dull monotone through the silent room, they are engaged in a hundred dumb yet ungodly antics behind his back.

Algernon has thrust his head far out between the rungs of his chair-back, and

affects to be unable to withdraw it again, making movements of simulated suffocation. The Brat is stealthily walking on his knees across the space that intervenes between them to Barbara, with intent, as I too well know, of unseemly pinchings. If father unbutton his eyes, or move his head one barley-corn, we are all dead men. I hold my breath in a nervous agony. Thank heaven! the harsh recitation still flows on with equable loud slowness. In happy ignorance of his offspring's antics, father is still asking, or rather ordering, the Almighty (for there is more of command than entreaty in his tone) to prosper the High Court of Parliament. Also the Brat is now returning to his place, travelling with surprising noiseless rapidity over the Turkey carpet, dragging his shins and his feet after him. I draw a long breath of relief, and drop my hot face into my spread hands. My peace, however, is not of long duration. I am

aroused again by a sort of choking snort from Tou Tou, who is beside me—a snort that seems compounded of mingled laughter and pain, and looking up, detect Bobby in the act of deftly puncturing one of her long lean legs with a long brass pin, which he has found straying, after the vagabond manner of pins, over the carpet.

I raise myself, and lean over Tou Tou, to give the offender a silent buffet of admonition, and, lifting my eyes apprehensively to see if I am noticed, I meet the blear eyes of Sir Roger fixed upon mine. He has turned his face quite towards me, and a ray from the candles falls full upon it. *Blear!* Well, if his eyes are blear, then henceforth blear must bear a different signification from the unhandsome one it has hitherto worn. Henceforth it must mean blue as steel : it must mean clear as a glass of spring water; keen as a well-tempered knife ; kindly as the early sunshine.

I am so astonished at my discovery, that I remain for full two minutes staring blankly at the object of it, while he also looks steadily at me; then recollecting my manners, I burrow my face into my chair-bottom, and so remain until mother's gentle Amen, and a noise of shuffling and scrambling to their feet on the part of the congregation, tell me that the end has come.

We all go up to father, and coldly and stiffly kiss him. While I am waiting for my turn to receive our parent's chilly salute, I steal a second glance at our guest. Yes, he is old certainly. Despite the youth of his eyes, despite the uprightness, the utter freedom from superfluous flesh—from the ugly shaky bulkiness of age—in his tall and stalwart figure, still he is old—old in the eyes of nineteen—as old as father, perhaps — though in much better preservation — forty-eight or forty-nine; for is not his hair iron-gray, and his heavy

moustache, and the thick and silky beard that falls on his broad breast, are not they iron-gray too? I have dropped my small and unwilling kiss on father's forehead—and said "good-night" in a tone as suppressedly hostile as his own. Now I may go. We may all go. I am the last, or I think I am, to pass through the swing-door. I hurry along the passage to join the rest in the school-room, and upbraid the boys for the rash impiety of their demeanour. I feel a foot on my garments behind, and hear a long cracking sound that I too, too well know to mean *gathers*.

"You beast!" cry I, in good nervous English, turning sharply round with my hand raised in act to strike, "that is the third time this week that you have torn out my——"

I stop dumbfoundered. If I mean to box the offender's ears, I must raise my hand considerably higher than it is

at present. Angels and ministers of grace! what has happened? I have called General Sir Roger Tempest a *beast*, and offered to cuff him. For a moment, I say, I am dumbfoundered. Then, for shyness has never been my besetting sin, and something in the genial laughter of his eyes re-assures me, I hold out the injured portion of my raiment, and say,

"Look! when you see what you have done, I am sure you will forgive me; but of course I meant it for Bobby. I never dreamt it was you."

He takes hold of one end of the rent—I of the other, and we both examine it.

"How exceedingly clumsy of me! how could it have happened? I beg your pardon ten thousand times."

In his words there is polite remorse and solicitude: in his face only a friendly mirth. He is old, that is clear. Had he

been young, he would have said, with that variety and suitability of epithets so characteristic of this generation,

"I am awfully sorry! how awfully stupid of me! what an awful duffer I am!"

The gas is shining in its garish yellow brightness full down upon us, as we stand together, illuminating my plain scorched face, the slatternly looseness of my hair, and the burnt hole in my gown.

"You will have to give me another," I say, looking up at him and smiling. I should not have thought of saying it if he had been a young man, but with a *vieux papa* one may be at one's ease.

"There is nothing in the world I should like better," he says, with a sort of hurry and eagerness, not very suggestive of a *vieux papa;* "but really—" (seeing me look rather ashamed of my proposition)—"is it *quite* hopeless? the damage quite irremediable?"

"On the contrary," reply I, tucking my gathers in, with a graceful movement, at the band of my gown; "five minutes will make it as good as new—at least" (casting a disparaging eye over its frayed and toffee-marked surface) "as good as it ever will be in this world."

A little pause.

"I suppose I have lost my way," he says, thinking, I fancy, that I look rather eager to be gone. "I am never very good at the geography of a strange house."

"Yes," say I, promptly; "you came through *our* door, instead of your own. shall I show you the way back?"

"Since I have come so far, may not I come a little farther?" he asks, glancing rather longingly at the half-open school-room door, whence sounds of pious mirth are again beginning to re-issue.

"Do you mean *really?*" ask I, with a highly dissuasive inflection of voice.

"Please not to-night: we are all higgledy-piggledy—at sixes and sevens! To tell you the truth we have been *cooking*. I wonder you did not smell it in the drawing-room."

Again he looks amused.

"May not I cook too? I *can*, though you look disbelieving; there are few people that can beat me at an Irish stew when I set my mind to it."

A head (Bobby's) appears round the school-room door.

"I say, Nancy, who are you colloguing with out there? I believe you have got hold of our future benefact——"

An "oh!" of utter discomfiture, and the head is withdrawn.

"I am keeping you," Sir Roger says. "Well, I will say good-night. You will shake hands, won't you, to show that you bear no malice?"

"That I will," reply I, heartily stretching out my right hand, and giving his a cordial shake. For was not he at school with father?

CHAPTER III.

DAY has followed night. The broiled smell has at length evacuated the school-room, but a good deal of toffee, spilt in the pouring out, still adheres to the carpet, making it nice and sticky. The wind is still running roughly about over the earth, and the yellow crocuses, in the dark-brown garden borders, opened to their widest extent, are staring up at the sun. How *can* they stare so straight up at him without blinking? I have been trying to emulate them—trying to stare, too, up at him, through the pane, as he rides laughing, aloft in the faint far

sky; and my presumptuous eyes have rained down tears in consequence. I am trying now to read; but a hundred thousand things distract me. The sun shining warm on my shoulder, as I lean against the window: the divine morning clamour of the birds: their invitations to come out that will take no nay: and last, but oh! not, *not* least, the importunate voices of Barbara and Tou Tou. Every morning at this hour they have a weary tussle with the verb "aimer," "to love." It is hard that they should have pitched upon so tender-hearted a verb for the battle-field of so grim a struggle.

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves.
Nous aimons,	We love.
Vous aimez,	You love.
Ils aiment,	They love.

This, with endless variations of ingenious and hideous inaccuracies—this, interspersed

with foolish laughter and bitter tears, is what I have daily been audience to, for the last two months. The day before yesterday a great stride was taken: the present tense was pronounced vanquished, and Barbara and her pupil passed on in triumph to the imperfect, "j'aimais, I loved, or was loving." To-day, in order to be quite on the safe side, a return has been made to "j'aime," and it has been discovered that it has utterly disappeared from our young sister's memory. "J'aimais, I loved, or was loving," has entirely routed and dispersed his elder brother, "j'aime, I love." The old strain is, therefore, desperately resumed.

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves, etc.

It is making me drowsy. Ten minutes more, and I shall be asleep in the sun, with my head down-dropped on the window-sill. I get up, and, putting on my

out-door garments, stray out into the sun leaving Barbara—her pretty forehead puckered with ineffectual wrath, and Tou Tou, blurred with grimy tears, to their death-struggle with the restive verb "to love." It is the end of March, and when one can hide round a corner from the wind, one has a foretaste of summer, in the sun's warm strength. I gaze lovingly at the rich brown earth, so lately freed from the frost's grasp, through which the blunt green buds are gently forcing themselves. I look down the flaming crocus throats—the imperial purple goblets with powdery gold stamens—and at the modest little pink faces of the hepaticas. All over our wood there is a faint yet certain purply shade, forerunner of the summer green, and the loud and sweet-voiced birds are abroad. Oh, spring! spring! with all your searching east winds, with your late shrivelling frosts, with your occasional untimely sleets and

snows, you are yet as much better than summer as hope is better than fruition.

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves.

It runs in my head like some silly refrain. I meet Bobby. I also meet Vick, my little shivering smooth white terrier. They both join me. The one wriggles herself into the shape of a trembling comma, and, foolishly abasing herself, rolls over on her back, to demonstrate her joy at my advent. The other says,

"Come into the kitchen-garden, and see whether the apricot-flowers are out on the south wall."

We pace along the broad and even gravel walk amongst the red cabbages and the sea-kale, basking in the sun, whose heat we feel undiminished by the influence of any bitter blast, in the prison of these four high walls, against which the long tree

branches are pinioned. In one place, the pinioning has failed. A long flower-laden arm has burst from its bonds, and is dangling loosely down. There is a ladder against the wall, set for the gardener to replace it.

"Is it difficult to get up a ladder, Bobby?" ask I, standing still.

"Difficult! Bless your heart, no! Why?"

"One can see nothing here," I answer. "I should like to climb up and sit on the top of the wall, where one can look about one."

My wish is easy of gratification. Bobby holds the ladder, and I climb cautiously rung by rung. Having reached the summit, I sit at ease, with my legs loosely dangling. There is no broken glass, there are no painful bottoms of bottles to disturb my ruminant quiet. The air bites a little, but I am warmly clad, and young. Bobby

sits beside me, whistling and kicking the bricks with his heels. There is the indistinctness of fine weather over the chain of low round hills that bound our horizon, giving them a dignity that, on clearer days, they lack. As I sit, many small and pleasant noises visit my ears, sometimes distinct, sometimes mixed together; the brook's noise, as it runs, quick and brown, between the flat dry March fields; the gray geese's noise, as they screech all together from the farmyard: the church-bells' noise as they ring out from the distant town, whose roofs and vanes are shining and glinting in the morning sun.

"Do you hear the bells?" say I. "Some one has been married this morning."

"Do not you wish it was you?" asks Bobby with a brotherly grin.

"I should not mind," reply I, picking out a morsel of mortar with my finger and

thumb. "It is about time for one of us to move off, is not it? And Barbara has made such a signal failure hitherto, that I think it is but fair that I should try my little possible."

"All I ask of you is," says Bobby gravely, "not to take a fellow who has not got any shooting."

"I will make it a sine quâ non," I answer seriously.

A louder screech than ever from the geese, accompanied with wing-flappings. How unanimous they are! There is not a voice wanting.

"I wonder how long Sir Roger will stay," I say presently.

"What connection of ideas made you think of him?" asks Bobby, curiously. "Do you suppose that he has any shooting?"

I break into a laugh.

"I do not know, I am sure. I do not

think it matters much whether he has or not."

"I dare say that there are a good many women—old ones, you know—who would take him, old as he is," says Bobby, with liberality.

"I dare say," I answer. "I do not know. I am not old, but I am not sure that I would not rather marry him than be an old maid."

A pause. Again I laugh—this time a laugh of recollection.

"What a fool you did look last night!" I say with sisterly candour, "when you put your head round the school-room door, and found that you had been witty about him to his face!"

Bobby reddens, and aims a bit of mortar at a round-eyed robin who has perched near us.

"At all events, I did not call him a beast."

"Well, never mind; do not get angry! What did it matter?" say I, comfortingly. "You did not mention his name. How could he tell that he was our benefactor? He did not even know that he was to be and I begin to have misgivings about it myself."

"I cannot say that I see much sign of his putting his hand into his breeches pocket," says Bobby vulgarly.

There is the click of a lifted latch. We both look in the direction whence comes the sound. He of whom we speak is entering the garden by a distant door.

"Get down, Bobby!" cry I, hurriedly, "and help me down. Make haste! quick! I would not have him find me perched up here for *worlds*."

Bobby gets down as nimbly as a monkey. I prepare to do likewise.

"Hold it steady!" I cry, nervously, and, so saying, begin to turn round and to stretch

out one leg, with the intention of making a graceful descent backwards.

"Stop!" cries Bobby from the bottom, with a diabolical chuckle. "I think you observed just now that I looked a fool last night! perhaps you will not mind trying how it feels!"

So saying, he seizes the ladder—a light and short one—and makes off with it. I cry "Bobby! Bobby!" suppressedly several times, but I need hardly say that my appeal is addressed to deaf ears. I remain sitting on the wall top, trying to look as if I did not mind, while grave misgivings possess my soul as to the extent of strong boot and ankle that my unusual situation leaves visible. Once the desperate idea of jumping presents itself to my mind, but the ground looks so distant, and the height so great, that my heart fails me.

From my watch-tower I trace the progress of Sir Roger between the fruit trees.

As yet he has not seen me. Perhaps he will turn into another walk, and leave the garden by an opposite door, I remaining undiscovered. No! he is coming towards me. He is walking slowly along, a cigar in his mouth, and his eyes on the ground, evidently in deep meditation. Perhaps he will pass me without looking up. Nearer and nearer he comes, I hold my breath, and sit as still as stone, when, as ill luck will have it, just as he is approaching quite close to me, utterly innocent of my proximity, a nasty teasing tickle visits my nose, and I sneeze loudly and irrepressibly. Atcha! Atcha! He starts, and not perceiving at first whence comes the unexpected sound, looks about him in a bewildered way. Then his eyes turn towards the wall. Hope and fear are alike at an end. I am discovered. Like Angelina, I—

> ———"stand confest,
> A maid in all my charms."

"How—on—earth—did you get up there?" he asks, in an accent of slow and marked astonishment, not unmixed with admiration.

As he speaks, he throws away his cigar, and takes his hat off.

"How on earth am I to get down again? is more to the purpose," I answer bluntly.

"I could not have believed that anything but a cat could have been so agile," he says, beginning to laugh. "Would you mind telling me how *did* you get up?"

"By the ladder," reply I laconically, reddening, and, under the influence of that same insupportable doubt concerning my ankles, trying to tuck away my legs under me, a manœuvre which all but succeeds in toppling me over.

"The *ladder!*" (looking round). "Are you quite sure? Then where has it disappeared to?"

"I said something that vexed Bobby," reply I, driven to the humiliating explanation, "and he went off with it. Never mind! once I am down I will be even with him!"

He looks entertained.

"What will you do? What will you say? Will you make use of the same excellently terse expression that you applied to me last night?"

"I should not wonder," reply I, bursting out into uncomfortable laughter; "but it is no use talking of what I shall do when I am down: I am not down yet, I wish I were."

"It is no great distance from the ground," he says, coming nearer the wall, standing close to where the apricot is showering down her white and pinky petals. "Are you afraid to jump? Surely not! Try! If you will, I will promise that you shall come to no hurt."

"But supposing that I knock you down?" say I, doubtfully. "I really am a good weight—heavier than you would think to look at me—and coming from such a height, I shall come with great force."

He smiles.

"I am willing to risk it; if you do knock me down, I can but get up again."

I require no warmer invitation. With arms extended, like the sails of a windmill, I hurl myself into the embrace of Sir Roger Tempest. The next moment I am standing beside him on the gravel walk, red and breathless, but safe.

"I hope I did not hurt you much," I say with concern, turning towards him to make my acknowledgments, but I really am very much obliged to you; I believe that if you had not come by, I should have been left there till bed-time."

"It must have been a very unpleasant

speech that you made to deserve so severe a punishment," he says, looking back at me, with a kindly and amused curiosity.

I do not gratify his inquisitiveness.

"It was something not quite polite," I answer shortly.

We walk on in silence, side by side. My temper is ruffled. I am planning five distinct and lengthy vengeances against Bobby.

"I daresay," says my companion presently, "that you are wondering what brought me in here now—what attraction a kitchen-garden could have for me, at a time of year when not the most sanguine mind could expect to find anything good to eat in it."

"At least it is sheltered," I answer, shivering, thrusting my hands a little further into the warm depths of my muff.

"I was thinking of old days," he says,

with a half-wistful smile. "Ah! you have not come to the time of life for doing that yet. Do you know I have not been here since your father and I were lads of eleven and twelve together?"

"*You* were eleven, and *he* was twelve, I am sure," say I, emphatically.

"Why?"

"You look *so much* younger than he," I answer, looking frankly and unembarrassedly up into his face.

"Do I?" (with a pleased smile). "It is clear then that one cannot judge of oneself; on the rare occasions when I look in the glass it seems to me that in the course of the last five years, I have grown into a *very* old fogy."

"He looks as if he had been so much oftener vexed, and so much seldomer pleased than you do," continue I, mentally comparing the smooth, though weather-beaten benignity of the straight-cut features

beside me, with the austere and frown-puckered gravity of my father's.

"Does he?" he answers, with an air of half-surprised interest, as if the subject had never struck him in that light before. "Poor fellow! I am sorry if it is so. Ah! you see"—with a smile—"he has *six* more reasons for wrinkles than I have."

"You mean us, I suppose," I answer matter-of-factly. "As to that, I think he draws quite as many wrinkles on our faces as we do on his." Then, rather ashamed of my over-candour, I add, with hurried bluntness, "You have never been married, I suppose?"

He half turns away his head.

"No—not yet! I have not yet had that good fortune."

I am inwardly amused at the form of his denial. Surely, surely he might say in the words of Lancelot,—

"Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine."

"And you?" he asks, turning with an accent of playfulness towards me.

"Not yet," I answer, laughing, "and most likely I shall have to answer 'not yet' to that question as often as it is put to me till the end of the chapter."

"Why so?"

I shrug my shoulders.

"In moments of depression it strikes Barbara and me, that we and Tou Tou shall end by being three old cats together."

"Are you so anxious to be married?" he asks with an air of wonder, "in such a hurry to leave so happy a home?"

"Every one knows best where their own shoe pinches," I answer vernacularly. "I am afraid that it does not sound very lady-like, but since you ask me the question, I *am* rather anxious. Barbara is not: *I* am."

A shade of I cannot exactly say what

emotion—it *looks* like disappointment, but surely it cannot be that—passes across the sunshine of his face.

"All my plans hinge on my marrying," I continue, feeling drawn, I do not know how or why, into confidential communication to this almost total stranger, "and what is more, on my marrying a rich man."

"And what are your plans?" he asks, with an air of benevolent interest, but that unexplained shade is still there.

"Their name is Legion," I answer; "you will be very tired before I get to the end of them."

"Try me."

"Firstly then," say I, narratively, "my husband must have a great deal of interest in several professions—the army, the navy, the bar—so as to give the boys a helping hand: then he must have some shooting—good shooting for them; for them all, that

is, except Bobby! *never* shall *he* fire a gun in my preserves!"

My mind again wanders away to my vengeances, and I break off.

"Well!"

"He must also keep two or three horses for them to hunt: Algy *loves* hunting, but he hardly ever gets a day. He is so big, poor dear old boy, that nobody ever gives him a mount——"

"Yes?"

"Well, then, I should like to be able to have some nice parties—dancing and theatricals, and that sort of thing for Barbara—father will never hardly let us have a soul here—and to buy her some pretty dresses to set off her beauty——"

"Yes?"

"And then I should like to have a nice large cheerful house, where mother could come and stay with me, for two or three months at a time, and get *clear* away from

the worries of housekeeping and——" the tyranny of father, I am about to add, but pull myself up with a jerk, and substitute lamely and stammeringly "and —and—others."

"Anything else?"

"I should not at all mind a donkey carriage for Tou Tou, but I shall not *insist* upon that."

He is smiling broadly now. The shade has fled away and only sunshine remains.

"And what for yourself? you seem to have forgotten yourself!"

"For myself!" I echo, in surprise, "I have been telling you—you cannot have been listening—all these things are for myself."

Again he has turned his face half away.

"I hope you will get your wish," he says shortly and yet heartily.

I laugh. "That is so probable, is not it? I am so likely to fall in with a

rich young man of weak intellect who is willing to marry all the whole six of us, for that is what he would have to do, and so I should explain to him."

Sir Roger is looking at me again with an odd smile—not disagreeable in any way—not at all hold-cheap, or as if he were sneering at me for a simpleton, but merely *odd.*

"And you think," he says, "that when he hears what is expected of him he will withdraw ?"

Again I laugh heartily and rather loudly, for the idea tickles me, and in a large family, one gets into the habit of raising one's voice, else one is not heard.

"I am so sadly sure that he will never come forward, that I have never taken the trouble to speculate as to whether, if he did, my greediness would make him retire again."

No answer.

"Now that I come to think of it, though," continue I, after a pause, "I have no manner of doubt that he would."

Apparently Sir Roger is tired of the subject of my future prospects, for he drops it. We have left the kitchen-garden: have passed through the flower-garden—have reached the hall-door. I am irresolutely walking up the stone steps that mount to it, not being able to make up my mind as to whether or no I should make some sort of farewell observation to my companion, when his voice follows me. It seems to me to have a dissuasive inflection.

"Are you going in?"

"Well, yes," I answer uncertainly, "I suppose so."

He looks at his watch.

"It is quite early yet—not near luncheon time—would it bore you very much to take a turn in the park? I think" (with a

smile) "that you are quite honest enough to say so if it would; or if you did not, I should read it on your face."

"Would you?" say I, a little piqued. "I do not think you would: I assure you that my face can tell stories, at a pinch, as well as its neighbour."

"Well, *would* it bore you?"

"Not at all! not at all!" reply I briskly, beginning to descend again; "but one thing is very certain, and that is, that it will bore *you*."

"Why should it?"

"If I say what I was going to say you will think that it is on purpose to be contradicted," I answer, unlatching the gate in the fence, and entering the park.

"And if I do, much you will mind," he answers smiling.

"Well, then," say I, candidly, looking down at my feet as they trip quickly along through the limp winter grass, "there is

no use blinking the fact that I have no conversation—none of us have. We can gabble away among ourselves like a lot of young rooks, about all sorts of silly home jokes, that nobody but us would see any fun in; but when it comes to real talk—"

I pause expressively.

"I do not care for *real talk*," he says, looking amused; "I like *gabble* far, far better. I wish you would gabble a little now."

But the request naturally ties my tongue tight up.

"This is the tree that they planted when father was born," I say, presently, in a stiff, cicerone manner, pointing to a straight and strong young oak, which is lifting its branchy head, and the fine network of its brown twigs, to the cold pale sky.

Sir Roger leans his arms on the top of the palings that surround the tree.

"Ah! eight-and-forty years ago! eight-

and-forty years ago!" he repeats to himself with musing slowness. "Hard upon half a century!"

I turn over in my own mind whether I should do well to make some observation of a trite and copy-book nature on the much greater duration of trees than men, but reflecting that the application of the remark may be painful to a person so elderly as the gentleman beside me, I abstain. However, he does something of the kind himself.

"To think that it should be such a stripling," he says, looking with a half pensive smile at the straight young trunk, "hardly out of the petticoat age, and *we*—he and I—such a couple of old wrecks!"

It never occurs to me that it would be polite, and even natural, to contradict him. Why should not he call himself an old wreck, if it amuses him? I suppose he only means to express a gentleman de-

cidedly in the decline of life, which, in my eyes, he is; so I say kindly and acquiescingly,

"Yes, it *is* rather hard, is it not?"

"Forty-one—forty-two — yes, forty-two years since I first saw him," he continues, reflectively, "running about in short, stiff, white petticoats and bare legs, and going bawling to his mother, because he tumbled up those steps to the hall-door, and cut his nose open."

I lift my face out of my muff, in which, for the sake of warmth, I have been hiding it, and opening my mouth, give vent to a hearty and undutiful roar of laughter.

"Cut his nose open!" repeat I, indistinctly. "How pleased he must have been; and what sort of a nose was it? already hooked? It never *could* have been the conventional button, *that* I am sure of; *yours* was, I dare say, but *his—never*. Good heavens!" (with a sudden change of

tone, and disappearance of mirth) "here he is! Come to look for you, no doubt! I—I—think I may go now, may not I?"

"Go!" repeats he, looking at me with unfeigned wonder. "Why? It is more likely *you* that he has missed, *you*, who are no doubt his daily companion."

"Not quite daily," I answer, with a fine shade of irony, which, by reason of his small acquaintance with me, is lost on my friend. "Two, you know, is company, and three none. Yes, if you do not mind, I think it must be getting near luncheon-time. I will go."

So I disappear through the dry knotted tussocks of the park grass.

CHAPTER IV.

"FRIENDS, Romans, and countrymen!" say I, on that same afternoon, strutting into the school-room, with my left hand thrust oratorically into the breast of my gown, and my right loftily waving, "I wish to collect your suffrages on a certain subject. Tell me," sitting down on a hard chair, and suddenly declining into a familiar and colloquial tone, "have you seen any signs of derangement in father lately?"

"None more than usual," answers Algy, sarcastically, lifting his pretty disdainful nose out of his novel. "If, as the Eton

Latin Grammar says, *ira* is a *brevis furor*, you will agree with me that he is pretty often out of his mind, in fact, a good deal oftener than he is in it."

"No, but *really?*"

"Of course not. What do you mean?"

"Put down all your books!" say I, impressively. "Listen attentively. Bobby, stop see-sawing that chair, it makes me feel deadly sick. Ah! my young friend, *you* will rue the day when you left me sitting on the top of that wall——"

I break off.

"Go on! go on!" in five different voices of impatience.

"Well then, father has sent a message by mother to the effect that *I* am to dine with them to-night—*I*, if you please—*I!* You must own" (lengthening my neck as I speak, and throwing up my untidy flax head) "that sweet Nancies are looking up in the world."

A silence of stupefaction falls on the assembly. After a pause,

"YOU?"

"Yes, *I!*"

"And how do you account for it?"

"I believe," reply I, simpering, "that our future benefac—, no! I really must give up calling him that, or I shall come out with it to his face, as Bobby did last night. Well, then, Sir Roger asked me why I did not appear yesterday. I suppose he thought that I looked so *very* grown up, that they must be keeping me in pinafores by force."

Algy has risen. He is coming towards me. He has pulled me off my chair. He has taken me by the shoulders, and is turning me round to face the others.

"Allow me!" he says, bowing, and making me bow, too, "to introduce you to the future legatee! Barbara, my child, you and I are *nowhere.* This depraved old man

has clearly no feeling for symmetry of form or face; a long career of Begums has utterly vitiated his taste. To-morrow he will probably be clamouring for Tou Tou's company."

"Brat!" says Barbara, laughing, "where has the analogy between me and the man who pulled up the window in the train for the old woman gone to?"

"Mother said I was to look as nice as I could," say I, casting a rueful glance at the tea board, at the large plum loaf, at the preparations for temperate conviviality. I have sat down on the thread-bare blue and red hearthrug, and am shading my face with a pair of cold pink hands, from the clear quick blaze. "What *am* I to wear?" I say, gloomily. "None of my frocks are ironed, and there is no time now. I shall look as if I came out of a dirty-clothes-basket! Barbara, dear, will you lend me your blue sash? Last time I wore mine

the Brat upset the gum-bottle over my ends."

"Let us each have the melancholy pleasure of contributing something towards the decking of our victim," says Algy, with a grin; "have my mess jacket!"

"Have as many beads as you can about you," puts in Bobby. "Begums always have plenty of beads."

A little pause, while the shifting flame-light makes small pictures of us on the deep-bodied tea-pot's sides, and throws shadowy profiles of us on the wall.

"Mother said, too, that I was to try and not say any of my unlucky things!" I remark presently.

"Do not tell him," says Bobby, ill-naturedly, "as you told poor Captain Saunders the other day, 'that they always put the fool of the family into the army.'"

"I did not say so of myself," cry I,

angrily. "I only told it him as a quotation."

"Abstain from quotations, then," retorts Bobby dryly; "for you know in conversation one does not see the inverted commas."

"What *shall* I talk about?" say I, dropping my shielding hand into my lap, and letting the full fire warmth blaze on eyes, nose, and cheeks. "Barbara, what *did* you talk about?"

"Whatever I talked about," replies Barbara, gaily, "they clearly were not successful topics, so I will not reveal what they were."

Barbara is standing by the tea-table, slim and willowy, a tea-caddy in one hand, and a spoon in the other, ladling tea into the deep-bodied pot—a spoonful for each person and one for the pot.

"I will draw you up a list of subjects to be avoided," says Algy, dragging his chair to the table, and pulling a pencil out of his

waistcoat pocket. "Here, Tou Tou, tear a leaf out of your copy-book—imprimis *old age.*"

"You are wrong there," cry I, triumphantly, "*quite* wrong; he is rather fond of talking of his age, harps upon it a good deal. He said to-day that he was an *old wreck!*"

"Of course, he meant you to contradict him!" says Bobby, cackling, "and from the little I know of you, I am morally certain that you did not—*did* you, now?"

"Well, no!" reply I, rather crestfallen; "I certainly did not. I would, though, in a minute, if I had thought that he wanted it."

"I wish," says Barbara, shutting the caddy with a snap, "that Providence had willed to send the dear old fellow into the world twenty years later than it did. In that case I should not at all have minded trying to be a comfort to him."

"He must have been very good-looking,

must not he?" say I, pensively, staring at the red fire caverns. "Very—before his hair turned gray. I wonder what colour it was!"

Visions of gold yellow, of sunshiny brown, of warm chestnut locks, travel in succession before my mind's eye, and try in turn to adjust themselves to the good and goodly weather-worn face, and wide blue eyes of my new old friend.

"It is so nice and curly even now," I go on, "twice as curly as Algy's."

"Tongs," replies Algy, with short contempt, looking up from his list of prohibitions.

"*Very* good looking!" repeat I, dogmatically, entirely ignoring the last suggestion.

"Perhaps when this planet was young!" retorts he, with the superb impertinence of twenty.

"You talk as if he were eighty years

old," cry I, with an unaccountably *personal* feeling of annoyance. "He is *only* forty-seven!"

"*Only* forty-seven!"

And they all laugh.

"Well, I must be going, I suppose," cry I, leisurely rising, stretching, sighing, and beginning to collect the various articles of my wardrobe, scattered over the furniture. "Good-bye, dear tea-pot! good-bye, dear plum loaf! *how* I wish I was going to stay with you! It really is ten minutes past dressing-time, and father is always so pleased when one keeps him waiting for his soup."

"He would not say anything to you to-day if you *were* late," says Bobby astutely. "You might tumble over his gouty foot, and he would smile! Are we not the most united family in Christendom—*when we have company?*"

After all I need not have disquieted my-

self: I am in very good time. When I open the drawing-room door, and make my entrance in the borrowed splendour of Barbara's broad blue sash tails, and the white virginity of my own muslin frock, I find that neither of my parents have as yet made their appearance. Sir Roger has the hearthrug to himself; at least he only shares it with Vick, and she is asleep; sitting very upright, it is true, with her thin tail round her toes, like a cat's, her head and whole body swaying from side to side in indisputable slumber. At sight of the chaste and modest apparition that the opened door yields to his gaze, an exclamation of pleasure escapes him—at least it sounds like pleasure.

"Ah! this is all right! You are here to-night at all events; but, by-the-by, what became of you yesterday?"

"What always becomes of me?" reply I, bluntly, lifting my grave gray eyes to his

face, and to the hair which sweeps thick and waved above his broad brown forehead. (Tongs indeed!)

"I remember that you told me you had been *cooking*, but you cannot cook *every* night."

"Not quite," reply I, with a short smile, stretching my hands to the blaze.

"But do not you dine generally?"

"Never when I can possibly help it," I reply, with emphasis. And no sooner are the words out of my mouth than I see that I have already transgressed my mother's commands, and given vent to one of "my unlucky things." I stand silent and ashamed, reflecting that no after-tinkering will mend my unfortunate speech.

"And to-night you could not help it?" he asks, after a slight, hardly perceptible, pause.

I look up to answer him. He is forty-

seven years old. He is a General, and a Sir, and has been in every known land: has killed big and little beasts, and known big and little people, and I am nineteen and nobody, and have rarely been beyond our own park and parish, and my acquaintance is confined to half-a-dozen turnipy squires and their wives; and yet he is looking snubbed, and it is I that have snubbed him. Well, I cannot help it. Truth is truth; and so I answer, in a low voice,

"No, father said I was to."

"And you look upon it as a great penance?" he says, still with that half-disappointed accent.

"To be sure I do," reply I, briskly. "So does Barbara. Ask her if she does not. So would you, if you were I."

"And why?"

"Hush!" say I, hearing a certain heavy well-known slow footfall. "He is coming!

I will tell you by-and-by—when we are by ourselves."

After all, how convenient an elderly man is! I could not have said that to any of the young squires!

His blue eyes are smiling in the fire-light, as, leaning one strong shoulder against the mantelpiece, he turns to face me more fully.

"And when are we likely to be by ourselves?"

"Oh, I do not know," reply I, indifferently. "Any time."

And then father enters, and I am dumb. Presently, dinner is announced, and we walk in; I on father's arm. He addresses me several times with great bonhomie, and I respond with nervous monosyllables. Father is always suavity itself to us, when we have guests; but, when one is not in the habit of being treated with affability, it is difficult to enter into the spirit of the

joke. Several times I catch our guest's frank eyes watching me with inquiring wonder, as I respond with brief and low-voiced hurry to some of my parent's friendly and fatherly queries as to the disposition of my day. And I sit tongue-tied and hungry—for, thank God, I have always had a large appetite—dumb as the butler and footman—dumb as the racing cups on the sideboard—dumber than Vick, who, being a privileged person, is standing —very tall—on her hind legs, and pawing Sir Roger's coat-sleeve, with a small, impatient whine.

"Why! Nancy, child!" says father, helping himself to sweetbread, and smiling, "what made you in such a hurry to get away this morning out of the park?"

(Why can't he always speak in that voice? always smile?—even his nose looks a different shape.)

"Near—luncheon-time," reply I, indis-

tinctly, with my head bent so low that my nose nearly touches the little square of bare neck that my muslin frock leaves exposed.

"Not a bit of it—half an hour off. Why, Roger, I am afraid you had not been making yourself agreeable! eh, Nancy?"

"No," say I, mumbling, "that is—yes—quite so."

"I was *very* agreeable, as it happened—rather more brilliant than usual, if possible, was not I? And, to clear my character, and prove that you thought so, you will take me out for another walk, some day, will not you?"

At the sound of his voice so evidently addressing me, I look up—look at him.

"Yes! with pleasure! when you like!" I answer heartily, and I neither mumble nor stutter, nor do I feel any disposition to drop my eyes. I *like* to look at him.

For the rest of dinner I am absolutely mute. I make only one other remark, and that is a request to one of the footmen to give me some water. The evening passes. It is but a short one—at least, as regards the company of the gentlemen, for they sit late; father's port, I am told, not being to be lightly left for any female frippery. I retire to the school-room, and regale my brethren with lively representations of father's unexampled benignity. I also resume with Algy the argument about *Tongs*, at the very point where I had dropped it. It lasts till prayer-time; and its monotony is relieved by personalities. The devil in the boys is fairly quiescent to-night, and our evening devotions pass over with tolerable peace; the only contre-temps being that the Brat, having fallen asleep, remains on his knees when "Amen" raises the rest of the company from theirs, and has to be privily and

heavily kicked to save him from discovery and ruin. Having administered the regulation embrace to father, and heartily kissed mother—not but what I shall see her again; she always comes, as she came when we were little, to kiss us in bed—I turn to find Sir Roger holding open the swing-door for us.

"Are you quite sure about it to-night?" I say, stretching out my hand to him to bid him good-night. "*Ours* on the right—*yours* on the left—do you see?"

"*Yours* on the right—*mine* on the left," he repeats. "Yes—I see—I shall make no more mistakes—unless I make one on purpose."

"Do not come without telling us beforehand!" I cry, earnestly. "I mean *really*: if you hold a vague threat of paying us a visit over our heads, you will keep us in a state of unnatural tidiness for days."

I make a move towards retiring, but he still has hold of my hand.

"And about our walk?"

The others — boys and girls — have passed us: the servants have melted out of sight; so has mother; father is speaking to the butler in the passage;—we are alone.

"Yes? what about it?" I ask, my eyes calmly resting on his.

"You will not forget it?"

"Not I!" reply I, lightly. "I want to hear the end of the anecdote about father's nose! I cannot get over the idea of him in a stiff white petticoat: I thought of it at dinner, whenever I looked at him!"

At the mention of father, his face falls a little.

"Nancy," he says, abruptly, taking possession of my other hand also, "why did you answer your father so shortly to-day?

Why did you look so scared when he tried to joke with you?"

"Ah, why?" reply I, laughing awkwardly.

"You are not *afraid* of him, surely?"

"Oh, no—not at all!"

"Why do you speak in that sneering voice? It is not your own voice; I have known you only twenty-four hours, and yet I can tell that."

"I will not answer any more questions," reply I, recovering both hands with a sudden snatch; "and if you ask me any more, I will not take you out walking! there!"

So I make off, laughing.

CHAPTER V.

"A PECK of March dust is worth a king's ransom," say I slowly next morning, as I stand by the window, trying to see clearly through the dimmed and tearful pane. "The king would have to do without his ransom to-day."

It is raining *mightily:* strong, straight, earnest rain, that harshly lashes the meek earth, that sends angry runlets down the gravel walks, that muddies the gold goblets of the closed crocuses.

"And you without your walk!" says Barbara, lifting her face from her stitching. "Poor Miss Nancy!"

"There is not enough blue sky to make a cat a pair of breeches!" cries Bobby, despondently, and with his usual vulgarity,

Sometimes I am tempted to fear that Bobby is hopelessly ungenteel—ungenteel for life. He has taken possession of another window, and is consulting the eastern sky.

"A ransomless king, and a trouserless cat! That is about the state of the case!" say I, turning away from the window with a grin.

After all, now I come to think of it, I am nearly as vulgar as Bobby. But I am right. Through the day, through the long light cold evening, the posture of the weather changes not. To-day, Barbara, Algy, and I are all constrained to dine; for have not we a dinner-party, or rather a mild simulation of one?—a squire or two, a squiress or two, a curate or two—such odd-come-shorts as can be got together in

a scattered country neighbourhood at briefest notice. Barbara and I, as it happens, are both late. It is five minutes past eight, when with the minor details of our toilettes a good deal slurred, with a paucity of bracelets and lack of necessary pins, we hurriedly and sneakingly enter the drawing-room, and find all our guests already come together. Mother gives us an almost imperceptible glance of gentle reproach, but father is so occupied in bantering a strange Miss—banter in which the gallant and the fatherly happily join to make that manner, which is the envy and admiration of the neighbourhood—that he seems unconscious of our entrance. An intuition, however, tells us that this is not the case, but that he is making a note of it. This depresses us so much that, until soup and sherry have comforted and emboldened us, we have not spirits to make any effort towards the entertainment of

our neighbours. We have been paired with a couple of curates. Mine is a strong-handed ingenuous Ishmael, who tells everybody that he hates his trade, and that he thinks it is very hard that he may not get out of it now that his elder brother is dead. I am thankful to say that his appetite is as vast as his shoulders; so, after I have told him that I *love* raw oysters, and that Barbara cannot sit in the room with a roast hare: and have heard in return that he does not care about brill, but worships John Dory, we slide into a gluttonous silence, and abide in it. Barbara's man of God is on a wholly different pattern to mine. He is a macerated little saint, with the eyes of a ferret, and the heart of a mouse. As the courses pass by, in savoury order, I, myself unemployed, watch my sister gradually reassuring, comforting, heartening him, as is her way with all weakly, maimed, and unhandsome crea-

tures. She has succeeded in thawing him into a thin trickle of parochial talk, when mother bends her laced and feathered head in distant signal from the table top, and off we go. We drink coffee, we drink tea, we pick clever little holes in our absent neighbours, in brisk duet and tortuous solo we hammer the blameless spinnet, we sing affecting songs about "fair doves," and "cleansing fires," and people "far away," and still our deliverers come not. They *must* hear our appealing melodies clearly through the walls and doors, but still they come not. Sunk in sloth and old port, still they come not. I seem to have said every possible thing that is to be said on every known subject to the young woman beside me, and now I am falling asleep. I feel it. Lulled by the warm glow diffused through the room, by the smell of the jonquils, lilies of the valley and daphnes, by the low even talk, I am slipping into slumber. The

door opens, and I jump into wakefulness; Sir Roger to the rescue. I am afraid that I look at him with something not unlike invitation in my eyes, for he makes straight towards me.

"Wish me good-morning," say I, rubbing my eyes, "for I have been sweetly asleep. I fell asleep, wondering which of you would come first—somehow I thought it would be you. Are you going to sit here? Oh! that is all right!" as he subsides into the next division of the ottoman to mine. "What have you been talking about?" I continue, with a contented chatty feeling, leaning my elbow on the blue satin ottoman top; "anything pleasant? Did not you hear our screams for help through the wall?"

"Have not we come in answer to them?"

Yes; they are all here now, at last; all, from father down to the curates; some

sitting resolutely down, some standing uncertainly up. Barbara's protégé, with frightened stealth, is edging round the furniture to where she sits on a little chair alone. Barbara is locketless, braceletless, chainless, headdressless! such was our unparalleled haste to descend. Ornaments has she none but those that God has given her: a sweep of blonde hair, a long cool throat, and two smooth arms that lie bare and white as any milk on her lap. As he nervously draws near, she lifts her eyes with a lovely friendliness to his face. He is poor, slightly thought of, sickly, not over clever; probably she will talk to him all the evening.

"Look at Barbara!" say I, with deep admiration, familiarly laying my hand on Sir Roger's coat sleeve, to make sure of engaging his attention, "that is always her way! Did you ever see anything so cruelly shy as that poor little man is? See!

he is wriggling all over like an eel! He came to call the other day, and while he was talking to mother I watched him. He tore a pair of quite new tea-green gloves into thin strips, like little thongs! He must find it rather expensive work, if he makes many morning calls, must not he?"

"Rather!"

"I am sure that you and Barbara would get on," continue I, loquaciously, leaning my head on my hand, and talking in that low, comfortable voice that our proximity warrants; "I cannot understand how it was that you did not make great friends that first night! I suppose that you are not poor and ugly and depressed enough for her to make much of you! Shall I make a sign to her to come over and talk to us?"

Sir Roger does not accept my proposal with the alacrity I had expected.

"Do not you think that she looks very

comfortable where she is?" he asks, rather doubtfully.

I am a little disappointed.

"I am sure she would like you," I say, with a dogmatic shake of the head. "I told her that you were—well, that *I* got on with you, and we always like the same people."

"That must be awkward sometimes?"

"What do you mean? Oh! not in *that* way—" (with an unblushing heart-whole laugh). "Lucky for me that we do not."

"Lucky for *you?*" (interrogatively).

"Why *will* you make me say things that sound mock-modest?" cry I, reddening a little this time. "You know perfectly well what I mean—it is not likely that any one would *look* at me when Barbara was by—you can have no notion," continue I, speaking very fast to avoid contradiction, "how well she looks when she is dancing

—never gets hot, or flushed, or *mottled*, as so many people do."

"And *you?* how do *you* look?"

"I grow purple," I answer, laughing—"a rich imperial purple, all over. If you had once seen me, you would never forget me."

"Go on: tell me something more about Barbara!"

He has settled himself with an air of extreme repose and enjoyment. We really *are* very comfortable.

"Well," say I, nothing loath, for I have always dearly loved the sound of my own voice, "do you see that man on the hearth-rug? —do not look at him this very minute, or he will know that we are speaking of him. I cannot imagine why father has asked him here to-night—he wants to marry Barbara; he has never said it, but I know he does: the boys—we all, indeed—call him *Toothless Jack!* he is not old *really*, I sup-

pose—not more than fifty, that is; but for Barbara!——"

I think that Sir Roger is beginning to find me rather tiresome: evidently he is not listening: he has even turned away his head.

There is a movement among the guests, the first detachment are bidding good-night, the rest speedily do the like. Father follows his favourite Miss into the hall, cloaks her with gallant care, and through the door I hear him playfully firing off parting jests at her as she drives away. Then he returns to the drawing-room. Sir Roger has gone to put on his smoking-coat, I suppose. Father is alone with his wife and his two lovely daughters. We make a faint movement towards effacing ourselves, but our steps are speedily checked.

"Barbara! Nancy!"

"Yes, father" (in a couple of very small voices).

"May I ask what induced you to keep my guests waiting half-an-hour for their dinner to-night?"

No manner of answer. *How* hooked his nose looks! how fearfully like a hawk he has grown all in a minute!

"When you have houses of your own," he continues with iced politeness, "you may of course treat your visitors to what vagaries you please, but as long as you deign to honour *my* roof with your presence, you will be good enough to behave to my guests with decent civility, do you hear?"

"Well, Roger, how is the glass? up or down? What is it doing? Are we to have a fine day to-morrow?"

For Roger apparently has got quickly into his smoking-coat: at least he is here: he has heard all. Barbara and I *crawl* away with no more spring or backbone

in us than in a couple of torpid wintry flies.

Five minutes later, "Do you wonder that we hate him?" cry I, with flaming cheeks, holding a japanned candlestick in one hand, and Sir Roger's right hand in the other. "I do not care if he *does* hear me!—yes, I do though" (giving a great jump as a door bangs close to me).

Sir Roger is looking down at me with an expression of most thorough discomfiture and silent pain in his face.

"He did not mean it, Nancy!" he says, hesitatingly, and with a sort of look of shamed wonder in his friendly eyes.

"*Did* not he?" (Ironically.)

A little pause, the position of the japanned candlestick and of Sir Roger's hand still remaining the same. "*How* I wish that *you* were my father instead!" I say, with a sort of sob. He does not, as I

fully expect, say, "So do I!" and I go to bed, feeling rather small, as one who has *gushed*, and whose gush has not been welcome to the recipient.

CHAPTER VI.

A FORTNIGHT has passed. Two Sundays, two Mondays, two Tuesdays, &c. Fourteen times have I sleepily laid head on pillow. Fourteen times have I yawningly raised it from my pillow. Fourteen times have I hungrily eaten my dinner, since the night when I stood in the hall with Sir Roger's hand in mine, raging against my parent. And Sir Roger is here still. After all there is nothing like the tenacity of boyish friendship, is there ?

I suppose that to Sir Roger, father is still the manly, debonnair youth that he

remembers thirty years ago. In happy ignorance he slurs over the thirty intervening years of moroseness, and goes back to that blest epoch in which I have so much difficulty in believing, and about which he, walking beside me now and again through the tender springing grass of the meadows, has told me many a tale. For our promised walk has come off, and so have many others like it.

He *must* be dotingly fond of father. It is the 15th of April. I dare say, O reader, that it seems to you much like any other date, but to me, through every back-coming year, it seems to gain fresh significance—the date that marks the most important day—take it for all in all—of my life, though whether for good or ill who shall say, until I am dead, and my life's sum reckoned up. I awake on that morning with no forecast of what is coming. I tear myself from my morning dreams with as sleepy unwillingness as

usual. I eat my bread-and-butter with as stolidly healthy an appetite. I run with as scampering feet, as evenly-beating a heart as is my wont, with little Vick along the garden walks, in the royal morning sun. For one of God's own days has come—one that must have lost his way and strayed from Paradise.

It has the steady heat of June, though we are only in mid-April, and the freshness of the prime. The leaves on the trees are but tender and tiny, and through them the sun sends his might. The tulips are all a-blaze and a-stare, making one blink with the dazzle of their odourless beauty: the frolicsome young wind is shaking out their balm from the hyacinth bells, and the sweet Nancies—my flowers—blowing all together, are swaying and congéing to the morning airs.

Oh, wise men, who know all things, do you know this? Can you tell it me?

Where does the flower hide her scent? From what full cup of hidden sweets does she suck it?

It is one of those days when one feels most convinced of being immortal—when the spirits of men stretch out longing arms towards the All Good, the Altogether Beautiful—when souls athirst for God yearn most deeply for the well of His unfathomed truth—when, to those who have lost, their dead come back in most pleasant gentle guise. As for me, I have lost nothing and no one as yet. All my treasures are still about me; I can stretch out live hands, and touch *them* alive; none of my dear names are yet to be spoken sparingly with bated breath, as too holy for common talk. And yet I, too, as I walk and bask, and bend to smell the hyacinth blooms, feel that same vague and most unnamed yearning—a delicate pain that he who has it would barter for no boisterous joy. The clocks tick out the

scented hours, and with loud singing of happy birds, with pomp of flowers and bees, and freaked butterflies, God's day treads royally past.

It is afternoon, and the morning wind, heavy with too much fragrance, has lain down to sleep. A great warm stillness is on the garden and house. The sweet Nancies no longer bow. They stand straight up, all a-row, making the whole place honied. The school-room is one great nosegay. Every vase, and jug, and cup, and pot and pan and pipkin that we can command is crammed with heavy-headed daffodils, with pale-cheeked primroses, with wine-coloured gilly-flowers, everything that spring has thrust most plentifully into our eager hands.

The boys have been out fishing.

Algy and Bobby have been humorously trying to drown the Brat.

He looks small and cold in consequence,

and his little pert nose is tinged with a chilly pink. Half an hour ago, mother called me away to a private conference, exciting thereby a mighty curiosity not unmixed with envy in my brethren.

Our colloquy is ended now, and I am re-entering the school-room.

"Well, what was it? out with it," cries Algy, almost before I am inside the door again. Algy is sitting more than half—more than three-quarters out of the window, balancing himself with great nicety on the sill. He is in the elegant *négligé* of a decrepid shooting-jacket, no waistcoat, and no collar.

"What have you been doing to your face?" says Bobby, drawing nigh, and peering with artless interest into the details of my appearance; "it is the colour of this" (pointing to a branch of red rhibes, which is hanging its drooped flowers, and joining its potent spice to the other flower-scents).

"Is it?" I answer, putting both hands to my cheeks, to feel their temperature. "I dare say! so would yours be, perhaps, if you had, like me, been having a——" I stop suddenly.

"Having a *what?*"

"I will not say what I was going to say," I cry emphatically, "it was nonsensical!"

"But what *has* she told you, Nancy?" asks Barbara, who, enervated by the first hot day, is languishing in the rocking-chair, slowly see-sawing. "What could it have been that she might not as well have said before us all?"

"You had better try and guess," I reply, darkly.

"I will not, for one," says Bobby doggedly, "I never made out a conundrum in my life, except, 'What is most like a hen stealing?'"

"It is not much like that," say I, demurely, "and in fact, when one comes to

think of it, it can hardly be called a conundrum at all!"

"I do not believe it is anything worth hearing," remarks the Brat, sceptically, "or you would have come out with it long ago! you never could have kept in to yourself!"

"Not worth hearing!" cry I, triumphantly raising my voice, "is not it? That is all *you* know about it!"

"Do not wrangle, children," says Algy from the window; "but Nancy, if you have not told us before the clock gets to the quarter" (looking impressively at the slowly travelling hands), "I shall think it right to——"

What awful threats would have followed will never now be certainly known, for I interrupt.

"I *will* tell you! I *mean* to tell you!" I cry, excitedly, covering my face with my hands, and turning my back to them all: "only do

not *look* at me! look the other way, or I *cannot* tell you."

A little pause.

"You have only three minutes, Nancy."

"Will you *promise*," cry I, with indistinct emphasis from under my hands, "none of you to *laugh*—not even Bobby?"

"Yes!"—"Yes!"—"Yes!"

"Will you *swear?*"

"What is the use of swearing?—you have only half a minute now. Well, I dare say it is nothing very funny. Yes, we will swear!"

"Well then, Sir Roger—I *hear* Bobby laughing!"

"He is not!"—"He is not!"—"I am not!—I am only beginning to sneeze!"

"Well then, Sir Roger——"

I come to a dead stop.

"*Sir Roger?* What about him? There is not a smile on one of our faces: if you do not believe, look for yourself!—What about our future benefactor?"

"He *is* not our future benefactor," cry I, energetically, whisking swiftly round to face them again, and dropping my hands, "he *never* will be!—he does not *want* to be! He wants to—to—to MARRY ME!—there!"

The murder is out. The match is set to the gunpowder train. Now for the explosion!

The clock hand reaches the quarter—passes it; but in all the assembly there is no sound. The westering sun shines in on four open mouths (the youthful Tou Tou is absent), on four pairs of stupidly staring eyes. The rocking-chair has ceased rocking. Bobby's sneeze has stopped half way. There is a petrified silence.

At length, "*Marry you!*" says the Brat, in a deeply-accented tone of low and awed disbelief. "Why, he was at school with father!"

"I wish to heavens that he had never been at school anywhere!" cry I, in a fury. "I am sick to death of hearing that he was

at school with father. Will no one ever forget it?"

"He is for-ty-se-ven!" says Algy, at last closing his mouth, and speaking with slow impressiveness. "Nineteen from forty-seven! how many years older than you?"

"Do not count!" cry I pettishly, "what is the use? not all the counting in the world will make him any younger."

"It is not true!" cries Bobby, with boisterous scepticism, jumping up from his seat, and making a plunge at me; "it is a *hoax!* she has been taking us all in! Really Nancy, for a beginner, you did not do it badly!"

"It is *not* a hoax!" cry I scornfully, standing scarlet and deeply ashamed, facing them all; "it is real plain downright simple truth."

Another pause. No sound but the monotonous unemotional clock, and the woodpecker's fluty laugh from the orchard.

"And so you *really* have a lover at last, Nancy?" says Algy, the corners of his mouth beginning to twitch in a way which looks badly for the keeping of his oath.

"Yes!" say I, beginning to laugh violently, but quite uncomfortably; "are you surprised? you know I always told you that if you half shut your eyes, and looked at me from a great way off, I really was not so bad looking."

"You have distanced the Begums!" cries the young fellow, joining in my mirth, but with a good deal more enjoyment than I can boast.

"So I have!" I answer; and my sense of the ludicrous overcoming all other considerations, I begin to giggle with a good will.

"Let us look at you, Nancy!" says the Brat, taking hold of me by both arms, and bringing the minute impertinence of his

face into close neighbourhood to mine. "I begin to think that there must be more in you than we have yet discovered! we never looked upon you as one of our most favourable specimens, did we?"

"Do not you remember old Aunt William?" reply I merrily; "how she used to say 'I was not pretty, my dears, but I was a pleasant little devil!' perhaps I am a pleasant little devil!"

"*Poor—dear*—old fellow!" says Barbara, in an accent of the profoundest, delicatest, womanliest pity, "*how* sorry I am for him! Nancy, how will you break it to him most kindly? I am afraid he will be sadly hurt! will you speak to him, or do it by letter?"

Barbara has risen. We are all standing up, more or less; it is impossible to sit through such news; Barbara's garden-hat is in her hand. The warm and mellow sun that is making Africa's dreary expanse in the map on the wall, one broad fire sheet,

is enkindling, too, the silk of her hair, the flower petals of her cheeks, the blue compassion of her eyes. My pretty tall Barbara! Let them say what they like, I am sure that somewhere—*somewhere*—you are pretty now!

"If you write," says Algy, still laughing, but with more moderation, "I should advise you to depute me to make a fair copy of the letter; else, from the extreme ambiguity of your handwriting, he will most likely mistake your drift, and imagine that you are saying yes."

"How do you know that I am not going to say yes?" I ask abruptly.

Rivers of additional scarlet are racing to my cheeks, over my forehead—in among the roots of my hair—all around and about my throat, but I stand, looking the assembled multitude full in the face, fairly, well, and boldly.

"Listen!" I continue, holding up my

right hand in deprecation, "let me speak! —do not interrupt me!—Bobby, I know that he was at school with father—Algy, I know that he is forty-seven—all of you, I know that his hair is gray, and that there are crows' feet about his eyes—but still—but still——"

"Do you mean to say that you are *in love* with him?" breaks in Bobby impressively.

Instances of enamoured humanity have been rare in Bobby's experience. With the exception of Toothless Jack, he has never had a near and familiar view of an authentic specimen. I therefore see him now regarding me with a reverent interest, not unmixed with awe.

"I mean nothing so silly!" I answer, with lofty petulance. "I am a great deal too old for any such nonsense!"

"There I go with you," says Algy, not without grandeur. "I believe that it is

the greatest humbug out, and that it rarely occurs between the ages of sixteen and sixty."

"Father's and mother's was a love match," says Bobby gravely. "Did not Aunt William tell us that they used always to sit hand in hand before they were married?"

A shout of laughter at our parents' expense greets this piece of information.

"*All* married people grow to hate one another after a bit," say I comprehensively; "it is only a question of time."

"But if you do not love him *now*, and if you are sure that you will hate him by-and-by," says Barbara, looking rather puzzled, "what makes you think of taking him?"

"It would be such a fine thing for all the family: I could give all the boys such a shove," say I, with homely shrewdness.

"They killed seven hundred head of

game on his big day last year; I heard him tell father so," says Bobby with his mouth watering.

"He has a moor in Scotland," throws in the Brat.

"He must ride a stone heavier than I do," says Algy, thoughtfully, "his horses would certainly carry me: I wonder would he give me a mount now and then."

"I would have you *all* staying with me *always*," I cry, warming with my theme, and beginning to dance, "all except father: he should come once a year for a week, if he was good, and *not at all*, if he was not."

"What will you call him, Nancy?" asks the Brat inquisitively. "What shall *we* call him."

"He will be Tou Tou's *brother*," cries Bobby, with a yell of delight.

"Hush!" says Barbara, apprehensively, "he will hear you."

"No he will not," I answer, composedly.

"A person would have to bawl even louder than Bobby does, to make him hear: he has gone away for a week; he said he did not wish me to decide in a hurry: he has given me till this day week, I wish it were this day ten years——"

"This day week then," says Algy, walking about with his hands in his pockets, and smiling to himself, "we may hope to see him return in triumph in a blue frock coat, with the ring and the parson: at that age one has no time to lose."

"Haste to the wedding!" cries the Brat at the top of his voice, seizing me by both hands, and forcing me to execute an uncouth war-dance, in unwilling celebration of my approaching nuptials.

"I hope that there will be lots of almonds in the cake!" says Bobby, gluttonously.

CHAPTER VII.

THE week's reprieve has ended; my Judgment Day has come. Never, never, surely, did seven days race so madly past, tumbling over each other's heels. Even Sunday—Sunday, which mostly contains at least forty-eight hours—has gone like a flash. Morning service, afternoon service, good books, sermon to the servants, supper, they all run into one another like dissolving views. For the first time in my life, my sleep is broken. I fall asleep in a fever of irresolution. I awake in one. I walk about in one. I feed the jackdaw in one. I box Bobby's ears in one. My

appetite (oh, portent!) flags. In intense excitement, who can eat yards of bread and butter, pounds of oatmeal porridge, as has ever been my bucolic habit? Shall I marry Sir Roger, or shall I not? The birds, the crowing cocks, the church bells, the gong for dinner, the old pony whinnying in the park, they all seem to say this. It seems written on the sailing clouds, on the pages of every book that I open. Armies of *pros* wage battle against legions of *cons*, and every day the issue of the fight seems ever more and more doubtful.

The morning of the day has arrived, and I am still undecided. I dress in a perfect storm of doubts and questionings. I put on my gown, without the faintest idea of whether it is inside out, or the reverse. I go slowly down stairs, every banister marked by a fresh decision. I open the dining-room door. Father's voice is the first thing that I hear; father's voice, raised

and rasping. He is standing up, and has a letter in his hand; from the engaging blue of its colour, and the harmony of its shape, too evidently a bill.

"I regret to have to hurt your feelings," he is saying, in that awful civil voice, at which we all—small and great—quake, "but the next time that *this* occurs" (pointing to the bill), "I must request you to find accommodation for yourself elsewhere, as really my poor house is not a fit place for a young gentleman with such princely views on the subject of expenditure."

The object of this pleasant harangue is Algy, who, also standing, with his face very white, his lips very much compressed, and his eyes flashing with a furious light, is fronting his parent on the hearth-rug.

Behind the tea-urn, mother is mingling her drink with tears, and making little covert signs to Algy, at all rates to hold his tongue.

My mind is made up, never to be unmade again. I will marry Sir Roger. He shall pay all Algy's debts, and for ever dry mother's sad wet eyes.

* * * * *

The weather of Paradise is gone back to Paradise. This day is very earthly. There has been a sharp cold shower, and there is still a strong rain wind, which has snapped a score of tulip heads. Poor brave Tournesols! Prone they lie on the garden beds, defiled, dis-petalled. Even the survivors are stained and dashed, and the sweet Nancies look pinched and small. If you were to go down on your knees to them, they could not give you any scent. I am walking up and down the room, in a state of the utmost agitation. My heart is beating so as to make me feel quite sick. My fingers are very hot, but hardly so hot as my face.

"For heaven's sake do not make me

laugh! do not!" cry I, nervously; "it would be *too* dreadful if I were to receive his overtures with a broad grin, would not it? There! is it gone? Do I look quite grave?"

I take half a dozen hurried turns along the floor, and try to think of all our most depressing family themes—father; Algy's college bills; Tou Tou's skull face and thin legs; nothing will do. When I stop before the glass and consult it, that hysterical smile is there still.

"Do you remember the day, when we were children, that we all went to the dentist?" says the Brat, chuckling, "and father gave Bobby a New Testament because he had his eye tooth out? Does to-day at all remind you of it, Nancy?"

"I had far rather have *both* my eye teeth out, and several of my double ones too," reply I, sincerely.

A little pause.

"I must not keep him waiting any longer," cry I, desperately. "Tell me!" (appealing piteously to them all), "do I look all right? do I look pretty natural?"

"You do not look *middle-aged* enough," says Bobby, bluntly.

"Put on your bonnet," suggests Algy. "You look twenty years older in that, particularly when you cock it well over your nose, as you did last Sunday."

"You are all very unkind!" say I, in a whimpering voice, walking towards the door.

"And if he becomes too demonstrative," says the Brat, overtaking me with a rush before I reach it, "say—

'Unhand me, gray-beard loon!'"

Then I go. As I know perfectly well that if I give myself time to think I shall stand with the drawing-room door-handle in my grasp for half an hour, before I can

make up my mind to enter, I take the bull by the horns, and whisking in suddenly and noisily, find myself *tête-à-tête* with my lover.

Certainly I never felt such a fool in my life. How *awful* it will be if I burst out laughing in his face! It is quite as likely as not that I shall do it out of sheer hysterical fright. Oh, how different! how much nicer it was when we last parted! I had taken him to see the jackdaw, and the little bear that Bobby brought from foreign parts; and jacky had bitten his finger so humorously, and we had been so merry, and I had told him again how much I wished that he could change places with father. And now! I *feel*—more than see—that he is drawing nigh me. Through my eyelids—for I am very sure that I never lift my eyes—I get an idea of his appearance.

Under his present aspect, I am much

more disposed to be critical, and to pick holes in him, than I was under his former one. Any attempt at youthfulness, any effort at *smartness*, will not escape my vigilant reprobation—down-eyed and red-cheeked as I appear to be. But none such do I find. There is no false juvenility—there is no trace of dandyism in the plain and quiet clothes, in the hair sparsely sprinkled with snow, in the mature and goodly face.

An iron-gray, middle-aged gentleman stands before me, more vigorous, more full of healthy life than two-thirds of the puny youth, nourished on sherry and bitters, of the present small generation, but with no wish, no smallest effort to take away one from the burden of years that God has laid on his strong shoulders.

There is no doubt that I shall not speak first, so for a moment there is a profound silence. Then I find my hot hand in Sir

Roger's, where it has so often and so familiarly lain before, and I hear Sir Roger's voice addressing me.

"I am an old fool, Nancy, and you have come to tell me so?"

Somehow I know that the bronze of his face is a little paled by emotion, but there is no sawny sentiment in his tone, none of the lover's whine. It is the same voice—as manly, as sustained—that made comments on Bobby's little bear. And yet, for the moment, I am physically unable to answer him. Who *can* answer the simplest question ever put with a lump the size of a cocoa-nut in their throat? My eyelids are still hopelessly drooped over my eyes, but by some sense that is not eye-sight, I am aware that there is a sort of shyness in his face, a diffidence in his address.

"Nancy, have I come back too soon? am I hurrying you?"

I raise my eyes for an instant, and then let them fall.

"No, thank you," I say, demurely, "not at all. I have had plenty of time!"

And then, somehow, there seems to me something so ludicrous in the sound of my own speech, that I tremble on the verge of a burst of loud and unwilling laughter.

"Speak out all your thought to me, whatever it is," he says, in a tone of grave entreaty, moved and tender, yet manly withal. "Look at me with the same friendly, fearless eyes that you did last week! I know, my dear, that you always think of others more than yourself, and I dare say that *now* you are afraid of hurting me! Indeed you need not be! I am tough and well-seasoned; I have known what pain is before now—it would be very odd at my time of life, if I had not! I can well bear a little more, and be the better for it perhaps."

I stand stupidly silent. One's outer man or woman often does an injustice to one's inner feelings. As he speaks my heart goes out to him, but I can find no words in which to dress my thought.

"Nancy!" in a tone of thorough distress. "I can bear anything but seeing you shrink and shiver away from me, as I have seen you do from your father."

"You *never* will see that," reply I, laconically, gathering bravery enough to look him in the face, as I deliver this encouraging remark.

"Do you think," he says, beginning to walk restlessly about the room—(long ago he dropped my limp hand)—"that all this week I have had much hope. Every time that I have caught a glimpse of myself in the glass, I have said, 'Is this a face likely to take a child's fancy? Do you bear much resemblance to the hero of her story books?' My dear"—(stopping before me)

—"you cannot think my presumption more absurd than I do myself."

"I do not think it at all absurd," reply I, beginning to speak quite stoutly, and to be rather diffuse than otherwise. "Perhaps I did, just at first, when they were all laughing, and saying about your having been at school with father; but *now* I do not in the least—I do not care what the boys say—I do not really. I am not joking."

At my words he half stretches out his hand to take mine; but, as if repressing some strong impulse, withdraws it again, and speaks quietly, with a rather sober smile.

"I am afraid that one's soul ages more slowly than one's body, Nancy! Even at my age it has seemed difficult to me to be brought into hourly companionship with all that was most fresh and womanly, and spirited, and pretty."

"*Pretty!*" think I. "I wish the boys

could hear him! they will never believe me if I tell them."

"And not wish to have it for my own, to take and make much of. I that have never had anything very lovely or lovable in my life. And then, dear, it was all your good-nature, you did not know what you were doing, but you seemed to find some little pleasure in my society—even chose it by preference now and then. My talk did not weary you, as I should have thought it would have done, and so I grew to think—to think—Bah!" (with a movement of impatience) "it was a foolish thought! what can there be in common between me and a child like you?"

"I think that there is a great deal," reply I, speaking very steadily, and so saying, I stretch out my hand and of my own accord put it in his again. He cannot well return it to me, so he keeps it.

"And yet it is impossible!" he says, with

hesitating interrogation while his steel-blue eyes look anxiously into mine.

"Is it?" say I, a wily smile beginning to creep over my features. "If it is, what was the use of asking me?" I have the grace to grow extremely red as I make this observation.

"Nancy!" seizing my other hand, too, and speaking in a hurried, low voice that slightly shakes with the force of his emotion, "what are you saying? You do not know what you are implying."

"Yes, I do," reply I, firmly. "I know perfectly."

"And it is *not* impossible?"

"Not at all, I should say."

Upon this explicit declaration an ordinary lover would have had me in his arms and smothered me with kisses before you could look round, but my lover is abnormal. He does nothing of the kind.

"Are you sure," he says, with an earnest

gravity and imploring emphasis, "that you understand what you are doing? Are you certain, Nancy, that if we had not been friends, if you had not been loath to pain me, that you would not have answered differently? Think, child! think well of it! this is not a matter of months or even years, but of your whole long young life."

"Yes," say I gravely, looking down. "I know it is."

And put thus solemnly before me, the idea of the marriage state seems to me hardly less weightily oppressive than the idea of eternity.

"How should I feel," he continues (he has put a hand on each of my shoulders, and is looking at me with a serious yet tender fixity), "if, by-and-by, in the years ahead of us, you came and told me that by my selfishness, taking advantage of your youth, I had destroyed your life?"

"And do you think," say I, with a flash

of indignation, "that even if you had done it, I should come and tell you?"

"Are you *quite* sure that among all the men of your acquaintance, men nearer you in age, more akin in tastes, men *not* gray-haired, *not* weather-beaten, *not* past their best years,—there is not one with whom you would more willingly spend your life than with me? If it is so, I *beseech* you to tell me, as you would tell your mother!"

"If there were," reply I, smiling broadly, a smile which greatly widens my mouth, and would show my dimples if I had any, "I should *indeed* be susceptible! The two curates that you saw the other night—the one who tore his gloves into strips, you know, and the other who ate so much—Toothless Jack—these are the sort of men among whom my lines have lain. Do you think I am likely to be very much in love with any of *them?*"

My speech does not seem so altogether reassuring as I had expected.

"I am very suspicious," he says, half apologetically, "but you have seen so little of the world, you have led such a nun's life! how can you answer for it that hereafter out in the world you may not meet some one more to your liking? You are a dear little, kindly, tender-hearted soul, and you do not tell me so, but you do not like me *much*, Nancy! Indeed, dear, I could far better do without you now, than see you by-and-by wishing me away and yet be unable to rid you of me."

"People can help falling in love," say I, with matter-of-fact common sense. "If I belonged to you of course I should never think of any one else in that way."

"Are you sure——?"

"I wish that you would not ask me any more questions," say I, interrupting him with a pout. "I am quite sure of everything you can possibly think of."

"I will only ask you *one* more—are you

quite sure that it is not for your brothers' and sisters' sakes—not your own—that you are doing this? Do you remember" (with a smile half playful, half sad) "what you told me about your views of marriage on that first day when I found you in the kitchen-garden?"

"I hope to heaven that you did not think I was *hinting*," say I, growing crimson; "it certainly sounded very like it, but I really and truly was not. I was thinking of a *young* man! I assure you" (speaking with great earnestness) "that I had as much idea of marrying you, as of marrying *father!*"

Looking back with mature reflection at this speech, I think that it may be safely reckoned among my unlucky things.

"No," he says, wincing a little, a very little. "I know you had not; but—you have not answered my question."

For a moment I look down irresolute,

then, through some fixed belief in him, I look up and tell him the plain, bare truth.

"I *did* think that it would be a nice thing for the boys," I say, "and so it will, there is no doubt; you will be as good as a fa—, as a brother to them; but—I like you *myself* besides, you may believe it or not as you please, but it is quite, *quite*, QUITE true."

As I speak the tears steal into my eyes.

"And *I* like *you!*" he answers very simply, and so saying, stoops, and with a sort of diffidence, kisses me.

* * * *

"Well, how did it go off?" cries Bobby, curiously, when I next rejoin my compeers. "Did you laugh?"

"*Laugh!*" I echo with lofty anger, "I do not know what you mean! I never felt in the least inclined." Then seeing my brethren look rather aghast at this sudden

change in the wind, I add gaily, "Bobby, you must never again breathe a word about Sir Roger's having been at school with father; let it be supposed that he did without education."

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS is my wooing: thus I am disposed of. Without a shadow of previous flirtation with any man born of woman—without any of the ups and downs, the ins and outs of an ordinary love affair, I place my fate in Sir Roger's hands. Henceforth I must have done with all girlish speculations as to the manner of man who is to drop from the clouds to be my wooer. Well, I have not many day-dreams to relinquish. When I have built Spanish castles—in a large family, one has not time for many—a lover for myself has been less the theme of my aspirations than a benefactor for the family.

One who will exercise a wholesomely repressive influence over father, has been more than anything the theme of my longings; on the unlikely hypothesis of my marrying at all. For, oh friends, it has seemed to me *most* unlikely; I dare say that I might not have been over difficult—might have thankfully and heartily loved some one not quite a Bayard, but one cannot love *anything*—any odd and end—and say what you will, the choice of a country girl, with a little dowry and a plain face, is but small. For—do not dislike me for it if you can help—I *am* plain. I know it by the joint and honest testimony of all my brethren. I have had no trouble in gathering the truth from them. A hundred times they have volunteered it, with that healthy disregard of any sickly sensitiveness, which arms one against blows to one's vanity through all after life. Yes: I am plain; not offensively so, not largely,

fatly, staringly plain, but in a small blonde harmless way. However, Sir Roger thinks me pretty. Did not he say so, in unmistakable English? I have tried darkly to hint this to the boys, but have been so decisively pooh-poohed that I resolve not to allude to the subject again. Not only am I plain now, but I shall remain plain to my life's end. Unlike the generality of ugly heroines, you will not see me develop and effloresce into beauty towards the end of my story.

The interval between my betrothal and my marriage is but short. On April 22nd, I put my hand into Sir Roger's. On May 20th, I am to put it into his for good. When the bridegroom is forty-seven, and the bride one of six, why should there be any delay? Why should a man keep and lodge his daughter any longer than he can help, when he has found some one else who is willing to do it for him?

This, I think, is father's view. And, meanwhile, father himself is more like an *angel* than a man. Not once do we hear the terrible polite voice that chills the marrow of our bones. Not once is his nose more than becomingly hooked. Not once does he look like a hawk. *Another* long bill comes in for Algy, and is dismissed with the benevolent comment that you cannot put gray heads upon green shoulders. I dine every day now; and father and I converse agreeably upon indifferent topics. Once—oh, prodigious!—we take a walk round the Home Farm together, and he consults me about the Berkshire pigs. Then comes a mad rush for clothes. I am involved in a whirlwind of haberdashery, Brussels lace, diamonds. It feels very odd—the becoming possessed of a great number of stately garments, to which Barbara has no fellows—Barbara and I, who hitherto have been always stitch

for stitch alike. And meanwhile, I see next to nothing of my future husband. This is chiefly my own doing.

"You will not mind," I say, standing before him one day in the drawing-room window, and speaking rather bashfully—somehow I do not feel so comfortably easy and outspoken with him as I did before the catastrophe—"you will not mind if I do not see much of you—do not go out walking—do not talk to you very much till—till—*it* is over!"

"And why am I not to mind?" he asks, half jestingly, and yet a little gravely too.

"You will have quite enough—*too much* of me afterwards," I say, with a shy laugh, "and *they*—they will never have much of me again—never so much, at least—and" (with rather a tremble in my voice) "we have had *such* fun together!"

And so Sir Roger keeps away. Whether his self-denial costs him much, I cannot

say. It never occurs to me at the time that it does. He may think me a very nice little girl, and that I shall be a great comfort to him, but he cannot care much about having any very long conversations with me—he that has seen so many lands, and known so many great and clever people, and read so many books. He has always been *most* undemonstrative to me. At *his* age, no doubt he does not care much for the foolish endearments of lovers; so, with an easy conscience, I devote myself, for my short space, to the boys, to Barbara, to Vick, and the jackdaw. Once, indeed —just once—I have a little talk with him, and afterwards I almost wish that I had not had it. We are sitting under a horse-chestnut tree in the garden—a tree that under the handling of the warm airs, is breaking into a thousand tender fans. We did not begin by being *tête-à-tête;* indeed, several lately occupied chairs intervene

between us, but first one and then another has slipped away, and we are alone.

"Nancy!" says Sir Roger, his eyes following the Brat, who is lightly tripping up the stone steps, looking very small and agile in his white flannel cricketing things, "what is that boy's real name? Why do you call him 'the Brat?'"

"Because he *is* such a *Brat*," reply I, fondly, picking up from the grass a green chestnut-bud, that the squirrels or the rooks have untimely nipped. "Did you ever see anything so little, so white and pert? He has sadly mistaken his vocation in life: he ought to have been a street Arab."

"One gets rather sick of one's surname," says my companion. "Except your father, hardly any one calls me Roger now! I should be glad to answer to it again."

He turns and looks at me with a kind of appeal as he says this. If he were not forty-seven and a man, I should say that he

was colouring a little. After all, blushing is confined to no age. I have seen a veteran of sixty-five redden violently.

"Do you mean to say," cry I, looking rather aghast, and speaking, as usual, without thinking, "that you mean *me* to call you *Roger!* indeed, I could not think of such a thing! it would sound so—so—*disrespectful!* I should as soon think of calling father, *James*."

"Should you?" he answers, turning away his face towards the garden-beds, where the blue forget-me-not is unrolling her sky-coloured sheet; and the double daisies are stiffly parading their tight pink buttons. "Then call me what you like!"

I am not learned in the variations of his voice, as I am in those of father and Algy, in either of which I can at once detect each fine inflection of anger, content, or pain; but, comparatively unversed as I am in it, there sounds to me a

slight, carefully smothered, yet still perceptible, intonation of disappointment—mortification. I wish that the air would give me back my words; but that it never yet was known to do.

"I will try if you like," say I, cheerfully, but a little shyly, as, like the March Hare and the Hatter in the Mad Tea Party, I move up past the empty chairs to the one next him. "I do not see, after all, why I should not get quite used to it in time! Roger! Roger! it is a name I have always been very partial to, until"—(laughing a little)—"the Claimant threw discredit on all Rogers!"

He is looking at me again. After all, I must have been mistaken. There is no shadow of disappointment or mortification near him. He is smiling with serene friendliness.

"You must never mind what *I* say," I continue, dragging my wicker chair along

the shortly-shorn sward a little nearer to him. "*Never!* nobody ever does; I am a proverb and a byword for my malapropos speeches. Mother always *trembles* when she hears me talking to a stranger. The first day that I dined after you came, Algy made me a list of things that I was not to talk about to you."

"A list of sore subjects?" says my lover, laughing. "But how did the boy know what *were* my sore subjects? What were they, Nancy?"

"Oh, I do not know! I have forgotten," reply I, in some confusion. "He made some very bad shots."

And so we slip away from the subject; but, all the same, I wish that I had not said it.

We have come to the day before the wedding. My spirits, which held up bravely during the first two weeks of my engagement, have now fallen—fallen, like

a wind at sundown. I am as limp, lachrymose, and lamentable a young woman as you would find between the three seas. I have cried with loud publicity in full school-room conclave: I have cried with silent privacy in bed. I have cried over the jackdaw. I have cried over the bear. I have not cried over Vick, as I am to take her with me. To-day we have *all* cried—boys and all; and have moistened the bun-loaf and the gooseberry jam at tea with our tears. Our spirits being now temporarily revived, I am undergoing the operation of trying my wedding dress. I am having a private rehearsal, in fact, in mother's boudoir, with only mother, Barbara, and the maid for audience.

"Mine is the most hopeless kind of ugliness," say I, with an admirable dispassionateness, as if I were talking of some one else, as, armed in full panoply, I stand staring at my white reflection, in a long

mirror let into the wall—staring at myself from top to toe—from the highest jessamine star of my wreath to the lowest edge of my Brussels flounce. "If I were very fat, I might fine down; if I were very thin, I might plump up—if I were very red, I might grow pale—if I were—hush! here are the boys! I would not for worlds that they should see me!"

So saying, I run behind the folding-screen—the screen which, through so many winter evenings, we have adorned with gay and ingenious pictures, and which, after having worked openly at it under her nose for a year and a half, we presented to mother *as a surprise*, on her last birthday.

"Come out, ostrich!" cries Algy, laughing. "Do you suppose that you are hidden? Did it never occur to you that we could see your reflection in the glass?"

Thus adjured, I reissue forth.

"Did you ever see such a fool as I

look?" say I, feeling very sneaky, and going through a few uncouth antics to disguise my confusion.

"Talk of *me* being a Brat," cries the Brat, triumphantly; "I am not half such a brat as you are! You look about ten years old!"

"Mark my words!" cries Bobby; "wherever you go, on the Continent, you will be taken for a good little girl making a tour with her grandpapa!"

Bobby is speaking at the top of his voice; as, indeed, we have all of us rather a bad habit of doing. Bobby has the most excuse for it, as, being a sailor, I suppose that he has to bellow a good deal at the Blue Jackets. In the present case, he has *one* more listener than he thinks. Sir Roger is amongst us. The door has been left ajar, and he, hearing the merry clamour, and having always the entrée to mother's room, has entered. By the

pained smile on his face, I can see that he has heard.

"You are right, my boy," he says, quite gently, looking kindly at the unfortunate Bobby; "she *does* look very—*very* young!"

"I shall mend of that!" cry I, briskly, putting my arm through his, in anxious amends for Bobby's hapless speech. "We are a family who age particularly early. I have a cousin whose hair was gray at five-and-twenty, and I am sure that any one who did not know father, would say that he was sixty, if he was a day, would not they, mother?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE preparations are ended; the guests are come; no great number. A few unavoidable Tempests, a few necessary Greys (I have told you, have not I, that my name is Grey?). The heels have been amputated from a large number of white satin slippers, preparatory to their being thrown after us. The school children have had their last practice at the marriage hymn.

I have resolved to rise at five o'clock on my wedding morning, so as to make a last gloomy progress round every bird and beast and gooseberry bush on the premises.

I have exacted—binding her by many stringent oaths—a solemn promise from Barbara to wake me, if I do not do so of my own accord, at the appointed hour. I am sunk in heavy sleep, and wake only very gradually, to find her, in conformity with her engagements, giving my shoulder reluctant and gentle pushes, and softly calling me.

"Is it five?" say I, sitting up and yawning. Then as the recollection of my position flashes across my mind, "I will *not* be married!" I cry, turning round, and burying all my face in my pillow again. "Nobody shall induce me! Let some one go and tell Sir Roger so."

"Sir Roger is not awake," replies Barbara, laughing rather sleepily, "you forget that."

And by the time he is awake, I have come to a saner mind. We dress, for the

last time, *alike*. The thought that never again shall I have a holland frock like Barbara's, is nearly too much for us both. We run quietly down stairs, and out into as august a morning as God ever gave His poor pensioners.

We walk along soberly and silently, hand in hand, as we used to do when we were little children. My heart is very, *very* full. I may be going to be happy in my new life. I fully expect to be. At nineteen, happiness seems one's right, one's matter of course; but it will not be in the same way. *This* chapter of my life is ended, and it has been *such* a good chapter, so full of love, of healthy, strong affection, of interchanged, kind offices, and little glad self-denials, so abounding in good jokes and riotous laughter, in little pleasures—that, looked back on—seem great; in little wholesome pains that—in retrospect—seem joys. And as we walk, the birds

"Prefer soft anthems to the ears of men
To woo them from their beds, still murmuring
That men can sleep while they their matins sing.
Most divine service, whose so early lay
Prevents the eyelids of the blushing day."

The old singers have said many a fine and lovely thing about lusty spring. From their pages there seems to come a whiff of clean and healthy perfume from many dead Mays. In sweet and matterful verse they have sung their praises; but, oh! no singer, old or new—none, at least, that was but human—none but a God-intoxicated man could tell the glories of that serenely shining and suave morn.

One so seldom sees the best part of a summer day. Buried in swinish slumber, with window curtains heedfully drawn, and shutters closely fastened, between us and it, we know nothing of the stately pageant spread outside our doors.

It is wasted: nay, not wasted, for the birds have it. It is so early, that the

gardening men are not yet come to their work. Everything is as wet as though there had been a shower, but there has been none.

Talk of the earth moving round the sun —he himself the while stupidly stock still— let *them* believe it who like: is not he now plainly sailing through the turquoise sea? Below the earth is unfolding all her freshened meadows, bravely pied with rainbow flowers. There is a very small soft wind, that comes in honied puffs and little sighs, that wags the lilac heads, and the long droop of the laburnum blooms. The grass is so wet— so wet—as we swish through it, every blade a separate green sparkle. The young daisies give our feet little friendly knocks as we pass.

All round the old flowering thorn there is a small carpet, milk-white and rose-red, of strewn petals. Every flower that has a cup, is holding it brimfull of cool dew.

Vick is sitting on the top of the stone steps, her ears pricked, and her little black nose working mysteriously as she sniffs the morning air.

On the bright gravel walk stands the jackdaw, looking rather a funereal object in his black suit, on this gaudy-coloured day; his gray head very much on one side, and his round sly eyes turned upwards in dishonest meditation. A worse bird than Jacky does not hop. His life is one long course of larceny, and I know that if he had the gift of speech, he would also be a consummate liar. I kneel on the walk, and, holding out a bit of cake, call him softly and clearly, "Jacky! Jacky!" He snatches it rudely, with a short hoarse caw, puts one black foot on it, and begins to peck.

"Jacky! Jacky!" say I, sorrowfully, "I am going to be married, do you know that? You may thank your stars that you are not."

As I speak, my tears fall on his sleek black wings and his dear gray head. I try to kiss him; but he makes such a spiteful peck at my nose, that I have to give up the idea. Thus one of my good-byes is over. By the time that they are all ended, and we have returned to the house, I am drowned in tears, and my appearance for the day is irretrievably damaged. My nose is certainly *very* red. It surprises even myself, who have known its capabilities of old. Bobby, always prosaic, suggests that I shall hold it in the steam of boiling water, to reduce the inflammation. But I have not the heart to try this remedy. It may be sky blue, for all I care. Nose or no nose, I am dressed now.

Instead of the costly artificial wreath that Madame Elise sènt me, Barbara has made me a little natural garland of my own flowers—my Nancies. I smell them all the time that I am being married. I have no

female friends—Barbara has always been friend enough for me—so I have stipulated that I shall have no other bridesmaids but her and Tou Tou. They are not much to brag of in the way of a match. Algy indeed has suggested that in order to bring them into greater harmony, Tou Tou shall clothe her thin legs with long petticoats, or Barbara abridge her garments to Tou Tou's length; but the proposition has met with as little favour in the family's eyes as did Squire Thornhill's proposal, that every lady should sit on a gentleman's lap, in the "Vicar of Wakefield."

The guests are all off to the church. I follow with my parents. Mother is inclined to cry, until snubbed and withered into dry eyedness by her consort. He is, however, all benignity to me. I catch myself wondering whether I *can* be his own daughter? whether I am not one of the train of neighbouring misses who have sometimes made

me the depository of their raptures about him.

We reach the church. I am walking up the aisle on red cloth : the wedding hymn is in my ears, gaily and briskly sung, though it *is* a hymn, and not an *Epithalamium :* a vague idea of many people is in my head. I am standing before the altar —the altar smothered in flowers. The old vicar who christened me is to marry me. I have declined the intervention of all strange bishops and curates whatsoever. He is a clergyman of the old school, and spares us not a word of the ritual.

Truly in no squeamish age was the marriage service composed ! I know—that is, I could have told you if you had asked me—that I am standing beside a large and stately person, to whom, if neither God nor man interpose to prevent it, I shall within five minutes be lawfully wed ; but I do not in the least degree realise it.

Now and again a strong sense of the ludicrous rushes over me. There seems to me something acutely ridiculous in the idea of myself standing here, so finely dressed—of the boys, demure and prim in their tall hats and Sunday coats, gathered to see *me* married—*me* of all people!

Like lightning flash there darts into my head the recollection of the *last time that I was married!* when, long ago when we were little children, one wet Sunday afternoon, for want of a job, I had espoused Bobby; and Algy, standing on a chair, with his night-gown on for a surplice, had married us. It is over now.

I am aware that several persons of different genders have kissed me. I have signed my name. I am walking down the churchyard path, the bells jangling gaily above my head, drowning the sweet thrushes; and the school-children flinging bountiful garden flowers before my feet. It

seems to me a sin to tread upon them. It goes to my heart. We reach the house. Vick comes out to meet us in a crawling grovelling manner, which owes its birth to the *shame* caused in her mind by the huge favour which my maid has tied round her little neck. We go into breakfast and feed —the *women* with easy minds; the *men*, with such appetites, as the fear of impending speeches, of horrible stuttered commonplaces leaves them.

I suppose that despite my change of name, I cannot yet be wholly a Tempest; for while I remain perfectly serene and calm during Sir Roger's few plain words, I am one red misery while Algy is returning thanks for the bridesmaids, which he does in so appallingly lame, stammering, and altogether agonising a manner, that I have serious thoughts of slipping from my bridegroom's side under the friendly shade of the table, among its sheltering legs.

Thank God it is over, and I am gone to put on my travelling dress. The odious parting moment has come. The carriage is at the door: the maid and valet are in the dickey. What a pity that they are not bride and bridegroom too! Vick has jumped in—alert and self-respecting again now that she has bitten off her favour.

I have begun my voluminous farewells. I have kissed them all round once, and am beginning again. How can one make up one's mind where to stop? with whom to end.

"Never you marry, Barbara!" say I, in a sobbing whisper, as I clasp her in my last embrace, greatly distorting my new bonnet, "it is *so* disagreeable!"

We are off, followed by a tornado of shoes—one, aimed with dexterous violence by that unlucky Bobby, goes nigh to cut the bridegroom's left eye open, as he waves his good-byes.

As we trot smartly away, I turn round in the carriage and look at them through my tears. There they all are! After all, what a nice-looking family! Even Tou Tou! there is something pretty about her, and standing as she is now, her legs look quite nice and thick.

* * * * * *

We reach Dover before dinner-time. Sir Roger has gone out to speak to the courier who meets us there. I am left alone in our great stiff sitting-room at the Lord Warden. Instantly I rush to the writing materials.

"What, writing already?" says my husband, re-entering, and coming over with a smile towards me. "Have you forgotten any of your finery?"

"No, no!" cry I, impulsively, spreading both hands over the sheet; "do not look! you must not look!"

"Do you think I *should?*" he says, reproachfully, turning quickly away.

"But you may," cry I, with one of my sudden useless remorses, holding out the note to him. "Do! I should like you to! —I do not know why I said it!—I was only sending them a line, just to tell them how *dreadfully* I missed them all!"

CHAPTER X.

I HAVE been married a week. A *week* indeed! a week in the sense in which the creation of the world occupied a week!—seven geological ages, perhaps, but *not* seven days. We have been to Brussels, to Antwerp, to Cologne. We have seen —(with the penetrating incense odour in our nostrils, and the kneeling peasants at our feet)—the Descent from the Cross, the Elevation of the Cross,—dead Christs manifold. Can it be possible that the brush which worthily painted Christ's agony, can be the same that descended to

eternise redundant red fishwives, and call them goddesses? We have given ourselves cricks in the neck, staring up at the divine incompleteness of Cologne Cathedral. And all through Crucifixions, Cathedrals, table d'hôtes, I have been deadly, *deadly* homesick—homesick as none but one that has been a member of a large family and has been out into the world on his or her own account, for the first time, can understand. When first I drove away through the park, my sensations were something like those that we all used to experience, on the rare occasions when father, as a treat, took one or other of us out on an excursion with him—the *honour* great but the *pleasure* small.

It seems to myself, as if I had not laughed once since we set off!—yes—*once* I did at the recollection of an old joke of Bobby's, that we all thought very silly at the time, but that strikes me

as irresistibly funny now that it recurs to me in the midst of strange scenes, and of jokeless foreigners.

After forty, people do not laugh at absolutely *nothing*. They may be very easily moved to mirth, as, indeed, to do him justice, Sir Roger is; but they do not laugh for the pure physical pleasure of grinning. The weight of the absolute *tête-à-tête* of a honeymoon, which has proved trying to a more violent love than mine, is oppressing me.

At home, if I grew tired of talking to one, I could talk to another. If I waxed weary of Bobby's sea tales, I might refresh myself with listening to the Brat's braggings about Oxford—with Tou Tou's murdered French lessons,

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves.

How many thousand years ago the

laboured conjugation of that verb seems to me!

Now, if I do not converse with Sir Roger, I must remain silent. And somehow, I cannot talk to him now, as fluently as I used. Before—during our short previous acquaintance,—when I used to pester the poor man with filial aspirations that he could not reciprocate, there seemed no end to the things I had to say to him. I felt as if I could have told him anything. I bubbled over with silly jests.

It never occurred to me to think whether I pleased him or not; but *now—now*, the sense of my mental inferiority—of the gulf of years and inequalities that yawns between us, weighs like a lump of lead upon me.

I am in constant fear of falling below his estimate of me. Before I speak, I think whether what I am going to say will be worth saying, and as very few of my

remarks come up to this standard, I become extremely silent. Oh, if we could meet some one we knew—even if it were some one that we rather disliked than otherwise: some one that would laugh and have as few wits as I, and be *young*.

But it is too early in the year for many people to be yet abroad, and, so far, we have fallen upon no acquaintances. Once indeed, at Antwerp, I see in the distance a man whose figure bears a striking resemblance to that of "Toothless Jack," and my heart leaps—detestable as I have always thought Barbara's aspirant; but on coming nearer the likeness disappears, and I relapse into depression.

Long ago, I had told my husband—on the first day I had made his acquaintance indeed,—that I had no conversation, and now he is proving experimentally the truth of my confession. At home, our talk has always been made up of allusions, half-words,

petrified witticisms that have become part of our language. Each sentence would require a dictionary of explanation to any strange hearer. *Now*, if I wish to be understood, I must say my meaning in plain English, and very laborious I find it.

To-day, we are on our way from Cologne to Dresden; sixteen hours and a half at a stretch. This of itself is enough to throw the equablest mind off its balance.

We have a coupé to ourselves. This is quite opposed to my wishes, nor is it Sir Roger's doing, but Schmidt, the courier, knowing what is seemly on those occasions —what he has always done for all former freshly-wed couples whom he has escorted, —secured it before we could prevent him. As for me, it would have amused me to see the people come in and out, to air my timid German in little remarks about the weather; albeit I have thus early discovered that the German which we have been

exhorted to talk among ourselves in the school-room, to perfect us in that tongue, bears no very pronounced likeness to the language as talked by the indigenous inhabitants. They *will* talk so fast, and they never say anything in the least like Ollendorf.

Sixteen hours and a half of a *tête-à-tête* more complete and unbroken than any we have yet enjoyed. All day I watch the endless, treeless, hedgeless German flats fly past; the straight lopped poplars, the spread of tall green wheat, the blaze of rape fields—the villages and towns, with two-towered German churches, over and over and over again. Oh for a hill, were it no bigger than a molehill! Oh for a broad-armed English oak!

At Minden we stop to lunch. The whole train pushes and jostles into the refreshment-room, and in ten galloping minutes we devour three filthy plats; a

nauseous potage, a terrible dish of sickly veal, and a ragged Braten. Then a rush and tumble off again.

The day rolls past, dustily, samely, wearily. There have been flying thunder-storms—lightning flashes past the windows. I hide my face in my dusty gloves to avoid seeing the quick red forks, and leave a smear on each grimy cheek. Every moment, I am a rape-field—a corn-field—a bean-field farther from Barbara, farther from the Brat, farther from the jackdaw.

"This is rather a long day for you, child!" says Sir Roger, kindly, perceiving, I suppose, the joviality of the expression with which I am eying the German landscape. "The most tedious railway journey you ever took, I suppose!"

"Yes," reply I, "far! It seems like three Sundays rolled into one, does not it? What time is it now?"

He takes out his watch and looks.

"Twenty past five."

"*Seven* hours more!" say I, with a burst of despondency.

"I am so sorry for you, Nancy! what can one do for you?" says my husband, looking thoroughly discomfited, concerned, and helpless. "Would you care to have a book?"

"I cannot read in a train," reply I, dolorously, "it makes me *sick!*" Then, feeling rather ashamed of my peevishness—"Never mind me!" I say, with a dusty smile; "I am quite happy! I—I—like looking out."

The day falls, the night comes. On, on, on! There is a bit of looking-glass opposite me. I can no longer see anything outside. I have to sit staring at my own plain, grimed, bored face. In a sudden fury, I draw the little red silk curtain across my own image. Thank God! I can no

longer see myself. Sir Roger ceases to try his eyes with the print of the "Westminster," and closes it.

"I wonder," say I, pouring some eau-de-cologne on my pocket-handkerchief, and trying to cleanse my face therewith, but only succeeding in making it a muddy instead of a dusty smudge. "I wonder whether we shall meet any one we know at Dresden?"

"I should not wonder," replies Sir Roger, cheerfully.

"Is the Hôtel de Saxe the place where most English go?" inquire I, anxiously. "Ah, you do not know! I must ask Schmidt."

"Yes, do."

"I hope we shall," say I, straining my eyes to make out the objects in the dark outside. "We have been very unlucky so far, have not we?"

"Are you so anxious to meet people?

are you so dull already, Nancy?" he asks, in that voice of peculiar gentleness, which I have already learnt to know hides inward pain.

"Oh, no, no!" cry I, with quick remorse. "Not at all! I have always *longed* to travel! At one time Barbara and I were always talking about it, making plans, you know, of where we would go. I enjoy it, of all things, especially the pictures—but do not you think it would be amusing to have some one to talk to at the *tables d'hôte*, some one English, to laugh at the people with?"

"Yes," he answers readily, "of course it would. It is quite natural that you should wish it. I heartily hope we shall. We will go wherever it is most likely."

After long, *long* hours of dark rushing, Dresden at last. We drive in an open carriage through an unknown town, moonlit, silent and asleep. German towns go

to bed early. We cross the Elbe, in which a second moon, big and clear as the one in heaven, lies quivering, waving with the water's wave; then through dim, ghostly streets, and at last—at last—we pull up at the door of the Hôtel de Saxe, and the sleepy porter comes out dishevelled.

"There is no doubt," say I aloud, when I find myself alone in my bedroom, Sir Roger not having yet come up, and the maid having gone to bed—addressing the remark to the hot water in which I have been bathing my face, stiff with dirt, and haggard with fatigue; "there is no use denying it, I *hate* being married!"

CHAPTER XI.

WE have been in Dresden three whole days, and as yet my aspirations have not met their fulfilment. We have met no one we know. We have borrowed the Visitors' Book from the porter, and diligently searched it. We have expectantly examined the guests at the *table d'hôte* every day, but with no result. It is too early in the year. The hotel is not half full. Of its inmates one half are American, a quarter German, and the other quarter English, such as not the most rabidly social mind could wish to forgather with. At the

discovery of our ill-success Sir Roger looks so honestly crestfallen that my heart smites me.

"How eager you are!" I say, laying my hand on his, with a smile. "You are far more anxious about it than I am! I begin to think that you are growing tired of me already! As for me," continue I, nonchalantly, seeing his face brighten at my words, "I think I have changed my mind. Perhaps it would be rather a *bore* to meet any acquaintances, and—and—we do very well as we are, do not we?"

"Is that true, Nancy?" he says, eagerly. "I have been bothering my head rather with the notion that I was but poor company for a little young thing like you, that you must be wearying for some of your own friends."

"I never had a friend," reply I, "*never* —that is—except *you!* The boys"—(with a little stealing smile)—"always used to call

you my friend—always from the first, from the days I used to take you out walking, and keep wishing that you were my father, and be rather hurt because I never could get you to echo the wish."

"And you are not much disappointed *really?*" he says, with a wistful persistence, as if he but half believed the words my lips made. "If you are, mind you tell me, child—tell me everything that vexes you—*always!*"

"I will tell you everything that happens to me, bad and good," reply I quite gaily, "and all the unlucky things I say—there, that is a large promise, I can tell you!"

I am no longer dusty and grimy; quite spick and span, on the contrary; so freshly and prettily dressed, indeed, that the thought *will* occur to me that it is a pity there are not more people to see me. However, no doubt some one will turn up by-and-by. The weather is serenely evenly fine. It

seems as if no rain *could* come from such a high blue sky. It is late afternoon or early evening. Since dinner is over—dinner at the godless hour of half-past four—I suppose we must call it evening. Sir Roger and I are driving out in an open carriage beyond the town, across the Elbe, up the shady road to Weisserhirsch. The calm of coming night is falling with silky softness upon everything. The acacias stand on each side of the highway, with the delicate abundance of their airy flowers, faintly yet most definitely sweet on the evening air.

I look up and see the crowded blooms drooping in pensive beauty above my head. The guelder-rose's summer snow-balls, and the mock orange with its penetrating odour, whiten the still gardens as we pass. The billowy meadow grass, the tall red sorrel, the untidy ragged robin, all the yearly recurring May miracles! What can I say,

oh, my friends, to set them fairly before you?

Under the trees the townsfolk are walking, chatting low and friendly. A soldier has his arm round a fat-faced mädchen's waist, an attention which she takes with the stolidity engendered by long habit. Dear, willing, panting dogs are laboriously dragging the washerwomen's little carts up hill.

"Vick," say I gravely, "how would you like to drag a little cart to the wash?"

Vick does not answer verbally, but she stretches her small neck over the carriage side, and gives a disdainful yet inquisitive *smell* at her low brethren. No words could express a fuller contempt for a dog that earns his own living.

The driver is taking his horses along very easily, but we do not care to hurry him. I have not felt so happy, so at ease, so gay since I was wed.

"This *is* nice," say I, making a frantic

snatch at a long acacia droop; "*how* I wish they were *all* here!"

Sir Roger laughs a little, and raises his eyebrows slightly.

"Do you mean *with us—now—in the carriage?* Should not we be rather a tight fit?"

"Rather," say I, laughing too. "We should be puzzled how to pack them all, should not we? We would be like the animals in a Noah's ark."

A little pause.

"General," say I, impulsively, "it has just occurred to me, are not you sometimes deadly, *deadly* tired of hearing about the boys? I am sure I should be if I were you. Confess! I will try not to be any angrier with you than I can help; but do not you sometimes wish that Algy and Bobby, and the Brat—not to speak of Tou Tou—were drowned in the Red Sea, or in the horse-pond at home?"

"At least you gave me fair warning," he says, with a smile. "Do you remember telling me that whoever married you would have to marry all six?"

"I wish you would not remind me of that," say I, reddening.

It was quite the broadest hint any one ever gave. The evening is deepening. We have reached Weisserhirsch. Now our faces are turned homewards again. As we pass the entrance to the Gardens of the Linkesches Bad, we see the lamps springing into light, and the people gaily yet quietly trooping in, while on the soft evening air comes the swell of merry music.

"Stop! stop!" cry I, springing up excitedly. "Let us go in. I *love* a band! It is almost as good as a Circus. May we, General? Do you mind? Would it bore you?"

Five minutes more, and we are sitting at a little round table, each with a tall green

glass of Maitrank before us, and a brisk Uhlanenritt in our ears. I look round with a pleasant sense of dissipation. The still green trees; the cluster of oval lamps, like great bright ostrich eggs; the countless little tables like our own; the happy social groups: the waiters running madly about with bif-tecks; the great-lidded goblets of amber-coloured Bohemian beer; the young Bavarian officers in light blue uniforms at the next table to us—stalwart, fair-haired boys—I should not altogether mind knowing a few of them; and over all, the arch of suave dark evening sky.

"What shall we have for supper?" cry I, vivaciously. "I never can see anybody eating without longing to eat, too. *Blutwurst?* That means Black Pudding, I suppose—certainly not *that*—how they do call a spade a spade in German! By-the-by, what are the soldiers having? Can you see? I think I saw a vision of *prawns!*

I saw things sticking out like their legs. I *must* find out!"

I rise, on pretence of getting a little wooden stool from under an unoccupied table close to the object of my curiosity, and as I stoop to pick it up, I fraudulently glance over the nearest warrior's shoulder. My sin finds me out. He turns and catches me in the act, and at the same time a young man—*not* a warrior, at least not in uniform, but in loose gray British clothes—turns, too, and fixes me with a stony, British stare. I am returning in some confusion, having moreover incidentally discovered that they were *not* prawns, when to my extreme surprise, I hear my husband addressing the young gentleman in gray.

"Why, Frank, my dear boy, is that you? Who would have thought of seeing *you* here?"

"As to that," replies the young man, stretching out a ready right hand, "who

would have thought of seeing *you?* What on earth has brought *you* here?"

Sir Roger laughs, but with a sort of shyness.

"Like the man in the parable, I have married a wife," he says, then putting his hand kindly on the young fellow's shoulder. "Nancy, you have been wishing that we could meet some one we knew, have not you? Well, here is some one. I suppose that I must introduce you formally to each other. Lady Tempest—Mr. Musgrave."

Despite the searching, and I should have thought, exhaustive examination of my appearance, that my new friend has already indulged in, he thinks good to look at me again, as he bows, and this time with a sort of undisguisable surprise in his great dark eyes.

"I must apologise," he says, taking off his hat. "I had heard that you were going to be married, but I am so behind the time,

have been so out of the way of hearing news, that I did not know that it had come off yet."

He says this with a little of that doubtful stiffness, which sometimes owes its birth to shyness, and sometimes to self-consciousness; but he seems in no hurry to return to his friends, the big blonde soldiers. On the contrary, he draws a chair up to our table.

"Do they ever get *prawns* here?" say I, with apparent irrelevancy, not being able to disengage my mind from the thought of shell-fish, "or is it too far inland? I am *so* fond of them, and I fancied that these gentlemen"—(slightly indicating the broad blue warrior-backs)—"were eating some."

His mouth curves into a sudden smile.

"Was that why you came to look?"

I laugh.

"I did not mean to be seen: that person must have had eyes in the back of his head."

I relapse into silence, and fish for the sprigs of woodruff floating in my Mai-trank, while the talk passes to Sir Roger. Presently I become aware that the stranger is addressing me by that new title which always makes me disposed to laugh.

"Lady Tempest, have you seen those lamps that they have here, in the shape of flowers? Cockney sort of things, but they are rather pretty."

"No," say I, eagerly, dropping my spoon and looking up; "*in the shape of flowers?* Where?"

"You cannot see them from here," he answers, "they are over there—nearer the river."

"I should like to see them," say I, decisively; "shall we, General?"

"Will you spare Lady Tempest for five minutes?" says the young man, addressing my husband; "it is not a hundred yards off."

At *my* words Sir Roger had made a slight movement towards rising; but, at the stranger's, he resettles himself in his chair.

"Will not you come, too? Do!" say I, pleadingly, and, as I speak, I half stretch out my hand to lay it on his arm; then hastily draw it back, afraid and ashamed of vexing him by public demonstrations.

He looks up at me with a smile, but shakes his head.

"I think I am lazy," he says; "I will wait for you here."

We set off; I with a strongish, but unexplained feeling of resentment against my companion.

"Where are they?" I ask pettishly; "not far off, I hope! I do not fancy I shall care about them!"

"I did not suppose that you would," he replies, in an extremely huffy tone; "would you like us to go back?"

"No," reply I, carelessly, "it would not be worth while now we have started."

We march on in solemn silence, not particularly pleased with each other. I am staring about me, with as greedily wondering eyes as if I were a young nun let loose for the first time. We pass a score—two score—three score, perhaps—of happy parties, soldiers again, a bourgeois family of three generations, the old grandmother with a mushroom hat tied over her cap—soldiers and Fräuleins *coketteering*. The air comes to our faces, dry, warm, and elastic, yet freshened by the river, far down in whose quiet heart all the lamps are burning again.

"Have you been here long?" says Mr. Musgrave presently, in a formal voice, from which I see that resentment is not yet absent.

"Yes," say I, having on the other hand fully recovered my good humour, "a good

while—that is, not very long—three, four, three whole days."

"Do you call that a *good while?*"

"It seems more," reply I, looking frankly back at him in the lamplight, and thinking that he cannot be much older than Algy, and that in consequence it is rather a comfort not to be obliged to feel the slightest respect for him.

"And how long have you been abroad altogether?"

We have reached the flower-lamps. We are standing by the bed in which they are supposed to grow. There are half-a-dozen of them: a fuchsia, a convolvulus—lilies.

"I do not think much of them," say I, disparagingly, kneeling down to examine them. "What a villanous rose! It is like an *artichoke!*"

"I told you would not like them," he says, not looking at the flowers, but switch-

ing a little stick nonchalantly about; then, after a moment, "How long did you say you had been abroad?"

"You asked me that before," reply I, sharply, rising from my knees, and discovering that the evening grass has left a disfiguring green trace on my smart trousseau gown.

"Yes, and you did not give me any answer," he replies, with equal sharpness.

"Because I cannot for the life of me recollect," reply I, looking up for inspiration to the stars, which the great bright lamps make look small and pale. "I must do a sum; what day of the month is this?—the 31st? Oh, thanks, so it is; and we were married on the 20th. It is ten days then. Oh, it *must* be more—it seems like ten *months*."

I am looking him full in the face as I say this, and I see a curious, and to

me *puzzling*, expression of inquiry and laughter in the shady darkness of his eyes.

"Has the time seemed so long to you, then?"

"No," reply I, reddening with vexation at my own *bêtise;* "that is—yes—because we have been to so many places, and seen so many things—any one would understand *that.*"

"And when do you go home?"

"In less than three weeks now," I reply, in an alert and rather joyful tone; at least I hope so—I mean—" (again correcting myself) "I *think* so."

Somehow I feel dissatisfied with my own explanations, and recommence.

"The boys—that is, my brothers—will soon be scattered to the ends of the earth; Algy has got his commission, and Bobby will soon be sent to a foreign station—he is in the navy, you will understand; and so

we all want to be together once again before they go."

"You are not going home *really* then?" inquires my companion, with a slight shade of disappointment in his tone; "not to *Tempest*—that is?"

"What a number of questions you do ask!" say I, impatiently. "Of what possible interest can it be to you where we are going?"

"Only that I shall be your nearest neighbour," replies he, stiffly; "and, as Sir Roger has hardly ever been down hitherto, I am rather tired of living next an empty house!"

"Our nearest neighbour!" cry I, with animation, opening my eyes. "Not *really?* Well! I am rather glad! Only yesterday, I was asking Sir Roger whether there were many young people about. And *how* near are you? *Very* near?"

"About as near as I well can be," answers he, dryly. "My lodge exactly faces yours."

"Too close," say I, shaking my head. "We shall quarrel."

"And do you mean to say," in a tone of attempted lightness, that but badly disguises a good deal of hurt conceit, "that you never heard my name before?"

Again I shake my head.

"Never! and, what is more, I do not think I know what it is now: I suppose I did not listen very attentively, but I do not think I caught it."

"And your tone says" (with a very considerable accession of huffiness) "that you are supremely indifferent as to whether you *ever* catch it."

I laugh.

"*Catch* it! you talk as if it were a *disease!* well!"—(speaking demurely)—"per-

haps on the whole it *would* be more convenient if I were to know it!"

Silence.

"Well! what is it?"

No answer.

"I shall have to ask at your lodge!"

"Who *can* pronounce their *own* name in cold blood?" he says, reddening a little. "I, for one, cannot—there—if you do not mind looking at this card——"

He takes one out of his pocket, and I stop—we are slowly strolling back—under a lamp, to read it.

MR. FRANCIS MUSGRAVE,
MUSGRAVE ABBEY.

"Oh, thanks—*Musgrave*—yes."

"And Sir Roger has never mentioned me to you—*really?*" he says, recurring with persistent hurt vanity to the topic. "How very odd of him!"

"Not in the least odd!" reply I, brusquely. "Why should he? He knew

that I was not aware of your existence, and that therefore you would not be a very interesting subject to me; no doubt"—(smiling a little)—"I shall hear all about you from him now."

He is silent.

"And do you live *here* at this Abbey"—(pointing to the card I still hold in my hand)—"*all by yourself?*"

"Do you mean without a *wife?*" he asks, with a half-sneering smile. "Yes—I have that misfortune."

"I was not thinking of a *wife*," say I, rather angrily. "It never occurred to me that you could have one! you are too young—a great deal too young!"

"*Too young*, am I? At what age, then, may one be supposed to deserve that blessing?—forty? fifty? sixty?"

I feel rather offended, but cannot exactly grasp in my own mind the ground of offence.

"I meant, of course, had you any father? any mother?"

"Neither. I am that most affecting spectacle—an orphan boy."

"You have no brothers and sisters, I am *sure*," say I, confidently.

"I have not, but why you should be *sure* of it, I am at a loss to imagine."

"You seem to take offence rather easily," I say, ingenuously. "You looked quite cross when I said I did not think much of the flowers—and again when I said I had forgotten your name — and again when I told you, you were too young to have a wife—now, you know, in a large family, one has all that sort of nonsense knocked out of one."

"Has one?" (rather shortly).

"Nobody would mind whether one were huffy or not," continue I, "they would only laugh at one."

"What a pleasant, civil-spoken thing a large family must be!" he says, dryly.

We have reached Sir Roger. I had set off on my little expedition feeling rather out of conceit with my young friend, and I return with those dispositions somewhat aggravated. We find my husband sitting where we left him, placidly smoking and listening to the band.

"Four and twenty fiddlers all in a row!"

They have long finished the Uhlanenritt, and are now clashing out a brisk Hussarenritt, in which one plainly hears the hussars' thundering gallop, while the conductor madly waves his arms, as he has been doing unintermittently for the last two hours.

"You were quite wise," say I, laying my hand on the back of his chair; "you had much the best of it! they were a great imposture!"

"Were they?" he says, taking his cigar

out of his mouth, and lifting his handsome and serene iron-gray eyes to mine. "They were farther off than you thought, were not they? I began to think you had not been able to find them."

"Have we been so long?" I say, surprised. "It did not *seem* long! I suppose we dawdled. We began to talk—bah! it is growing chill! let us go home!"

Mr. Musgrave accompanies us to the entrance to the gardens.

"Good night, Frank!" cries Sir Roger, as he follows me into the carriage.

As soon as I am in, I recollect that I have ungratefully forgotten to shake hands with my late escort.

"Good night!" cry I, too, stretching out a compunctious hand, over Sir Roger and the carriage-side. "I am so sorry! I forgot all about you!"

"What hotel are you at?" asks Sir Roger, closing the carriage-door after him.

"The Victoria? Oh, yes. We are at the Saxe. You must come and look us up when you have nothing better to do. Our rooms are No.—what is it, Nancy? I never can recollect."

"No. 5," reply I. "But, indeed, it is not much use any one coming to call upon us, is it? For we are always out—morning, noon, and night."

With this parting encouragement on my part, we drive off, and leave our young friend, trying, with only moderate success, to combine a gracious smile to Sir Roger, with a resentful scowl at me, under a lamp-post. We roll along quickly and easily, through the soft, cool, lamp-lit night.

"Well, how did you get on with him, Nancy?" asks Sir Roger. "Good-looking fellow, is not he?"

"Is he?" say I, carelessly. "Yes, I suppose he is, only that I never *can* admire *dark* men: I am so glad that all the boys

are fair—I should have hated a *black* brother."

"How do you know that my hair was not coal-black before it turned gray?" he asks, with a smile. "It may have been the hue of the carrion-crow for all you know."

"I am *sure* it was not," reply I, stoutly; then, after a little pause, "I do not think that I *did* get on well with him—not what *I* call getting on—he seems rather a touchy young gentleman."

"You must not quarrel with him, Nancy," says Sir Roger, laughing. "He lives not a stone's throw from us."

"So he told me!"

"Poor fellow!" with an accent of compassion. "He has never had much of a chance; he has been his own master almost ever since he was born—a bad thing for any boy—he has no parents, you know."

"So he told me."

"Neither has he any brothers or sisters."

"So he told me!"

"He seems to have told you a great many things."

"Yes," reply I, "but then I asked him a great many questions: our conversation was rather like the catechism: the moment I stopped asking *him* questions, he began asking me!"

CHAPTER XII.

THREE long days—all blue and gold—blue sky and gold sunshine—roll away. If Schmidt, the courier, *has* a fault, it is over-driving us. We visit the Grüne Gewölbe, the Japanese Palace, the Zwinger,—and we visit them *alone.* Dresden is not a very large place, yet in no part of it, in none of its bright streets—in neither its old nor its new market, in none of its public places, do I catch a glimpse of my new acquaintance. Neither does he come to call. This last fact surprises me a little, and disappoints me a good deal. Our walk at

the Linkesches Bad in the gay lamp-light, his character, his conversation, even his appearance, begin to undergo a transformation in my mind. After all, he was not *really* dark,—not one of those black men, against whom Barbara and I have always lifted up our testimonies; by day-light, I think his eyes would have been hazel. He certainly was very easy to talk to. One had not to pump up conversation for him, and I do not suppose that, *as men go*, he was *really* very touchy. One cannot expect everybody to be so jest-hardened and robustly good-tempered as the boys. Often, before now, I have only been able to gauge the unfortunateness of my speeches to men, by the rasping effect they have had on their tempers, and which has often taken me honestly by surprise.

"*Again*, Mr. Musgrave has not been to call," say I, one afternoon, on returning

from a long and rather grilling drive, speaking in a slightly annoyed tone.

"Did you expect that he would?" asks Sir Roger, with a smile. "I think that, after the searching snub you gave him, he would have been a bolder man than I take him for, if he had risked his head in the lion's mouth."

"*Am* I such a lion?" say I, with an accent of vexation. "*Did* I snub him? I am sure I had no more idea of snubbing him than I had of snubbing *you;* that is the way in which I always cut my own throat?"

I draw a chair into the balcony, where he has already established himself with his cigar, and sit down beside him.

"I foresee," say I, beginning to laugh rather grimly, "that a desert will spread all round our house! your friends will disappear before my tongue, like morning mist."

"Let them!"

After a pause, edging a little nearer to him, and—regardless of the hay-carts in the market below—laying my fair-haired head on his shoulder,

"What *could* have made you marry such a *shrew?* I believe it was the purest philanthropy."

"That was it!" he answers, fondly. "To save any other poor fellow from such an infliction!"

"Quite unnecessary!" rejoin I, shaking my head. "If you had not married me, it is very certain that nobody else would!"

Another day has come. It is hot afternoon. Sir Roger is reading the *Times* in our balcony, and I am strolling along the dazzling streets by myself. What can equal the white glare of a foreign town? I am strolling along by myself under a big sunshade. My progress is slow, as my nose has a disposition to flatten itself

against every shop window—saving, perhaps, the cigar ones. A grave problem is engaging my mind. What present am I to take to father? It is this question which moiders our young brains as often as his birthday recurs. My thoughts are trailing back over all our former gifts to him. This year we gave him a spectacle-case (he is short-sighted): last year a pocket-book; the year before, an inkstand. What is there left to give him? A cigar-case? He does not smoke. A hunting-flask? He has half a dozen. A Norwegian stove? He does not approve of them, but says that men ought to be satisfied with sandwiches out shooting. A telescope? He never lifts his eyes high enough above our delinquencies, to look at the stars. I cannot arrive at any approximation to a decision. As I issue from a china shop, with a brown-paper parcel under my arm, and out on the hot and

glaring flags, I see a young man come stepping down the street, with a long loose British stride; a young man pale and comely, and a good deal worn out by the flies, who have also eaten most of me.

"How are you?" cry I, hastily shifting my umbrella to the other hand, so as to have my right one ready to offer him. "Are not these streets blinding? I am blinking like an owl in daylight!—so you never came to see us, after all!"

"It was so likely that I should!" he answers, with his nose in the air.

"Very likely!" reply I, taking him literally; "so likely that I have been expecting you every day."

"You seem to forget—confound these flies!"—(as a stout blue-bottle blunders into one flashing eye)—"you seem to forget that you told me, in so many words, to stay away."

"You *were* huffy, then!" say I, with an

accent of incredulity. "Sir Roger was right! he said you were, and I could not believe it: he was quite sorry for you. He said I had snubbed you so."

"*Snubbed* me!" reddening self-consciously, and drawing himself up as if he did not much relish the application of the word. "I do not often give any one the chance of doing that *twice!*"

"You are not going to be offended *again*, I suppose," say I, apprehensively; "it must be with Sir Roger this time, if you are! it was he that was sorry for you, not *I*."

We look at each other under my green sunshade (his eyes *are* hazel, by daylight), and then we both burst into a duet of foolish friendly laughter.

"I want you to give me your advice," say I, as we toddle amicably along side by side. "What would be a nice present for a gentleman—an elderly gentleman—at

least, *rather* elderly, who *has* a spectacle-case, a pocket-book, an inkstand, six Church services, and who does not smoke?"

"But he *does* smoke," says Mr. Musgrave, correcting me. "I *saw* him the other day."

"Saw *whom?* What—do you mean?"

"Are not you talking of Sir Roger?" he asks, with an accent of surprise.

"*Sir Roger!*" (indignantly). "No, indeed! do you think *he* wants spectacles? No! I was talking of my father."

"*Your father?* You are not, like me, a poor misguided orphan, then; you have a father."

"I should think I *had*," reply I, expressively.

"Any brothers? Oh, yes, by-the-by, I know you have! you held them up for my imitation the other day—half a dozen fellows who never take offence at anything."

"No more they do!" cry I, firing up. "If I tell them when I go home, as I certainly shall, if I remember, that you were out of humour and bore malice for *three* whole days, because I happened to say that we were generally out of doors most of the day,—they will not believe it—simply they will not."

"And have you also six sisters?" asks the young man, dexterously shifting the conversation a little.

"No, two."

"And are they *all* to have presents?—six and two is eight, and your father nine, and—I suppose you have a mother, too?"

"Yes."

"Nine and one is ten—ten brown paper parcels each as large as the one you now have under your arm—by-the-by, would you like me to carry it? *What* a lot you will have to pay for extra luggage!"

His offer to carry my parcel is so slightly

and incidentally made, and is so unaccompanied by any gesture suited to the words, that I decline the attention. The people pass to and fro in the sun as we pace leisurely along.

"Have you nearly done your shopping?" asks my companion presently.

"Very nearly."

"What do you say to taking a turn through the Gallery?" he says, "or are you sick of the pictures?"

"Far from it," say I, briskly, "but all the same I cannot do it; I am going back at once to Sir Roger; we are to drive to Loschwitz: I only came out for a little prowl by myself to think about father's present! Sir Roger cannot help me at all," I continue, wandering off again into the theme which is uppermost in my thoughts. "*He* suggested a travelling-bag, but I know that father would *hate* that."

"To *drive!* this time of day!" cries

Mr. Musgrave, in a tone of extreme disapprobation; "will not you get well baked?"

"I dare say," I answer absently; then, in a low tone to myself, "*Why* does not he smoke? it would be so easy then—a smoking-cap, a tobacco-pouch, a cigar-holder, a hundred things!"

"Is it *quite* settled about Loschwitz?" asks the young man, with an air of indifference.

"Quite," say I, still not thinking of what I am saying. "That is, no—not quite—nearly—a bag *is* useful, you know."

"I passed the Saxe just now," he says, giving his hat a little tilt over his nose, "and saw Sir Roger sitting in the balcony with his cigar and his *Times*, and he looked so luxuriously comfortable that it seemed a sin to disturb him. Do not you think, taking the dust and the bluebottles into consideration, that it would be kinder to leave him in peace in his arm-chair?"

"No, I do not," reply I, flatly. "I suppose he knows best what he likes himself; and why a strong, hearty man in the prime of life should be supposed to wish to spend a whole summer afternoon nodding in an arm-chair, any more than you would wish it yourself, I am at a loss to inquire!" The suggestion has irritated me so much that for the moment I forget the travelling-bag.

"When I am as old as he," replies the young man coldly, shaking the ash off his cigar, "if I ever am, which I doubt, and have knocked about the world for as many years, and imperilled my liver in as many climates, and sent as many Russians and Chinamen and Sikhs to glory as he has, I shall think myself entitled to sit in an arm-chair—yes, and sleep in it too—all day, if I feel inclined."

I do not answer, partly because I am exasperated, partly because at this moment my eye is caught by an object in a shop

window—a travelling-bag with its mouth invitingly open, displaying all manner of manly conveniences. I hastily furl my green umbrella, and step in. My squire does not follow me. I hardly notice the fact, but suppose that he is standing outside in the sun. However, when I re-issue forth, I find that he has disappeared. I look up the street, down the street. There is no trace of him. I walk away, feeling a little mortified. I go into a few more shops: I dawdle over some china. Then I turn my steps homewards.

At a narrow street corner, in the grateful shade cast by some tall houses, I come face to face with him again.

"Did not you wonder where I had disappeared to?" he asks; "or perhaps you never noticed that I had?"

He is panting a little as if he had been running, or walking fast.

"I thought that most likely you had

taken offence again," reply I, with a laugh, "and that I had lost sight of you for three more days."

"I have been to the Hôtel de Saxe," he replies, with a rather triumphant smile on his handsome moustacheless lips. "I thought I would find out about Loschwitz."

"Find out *what?*" cry I, standing still, raising my voice a little, and growing even redder than the sun, the flies, the brown paper parcel, and the heavy umbrella have already made me. "There was nothing to find out! I wish you would leave things alone; I wish you would let me manage my own business."

The smile disappears rather rapidly.

"You have not been telling the General," continue I, in a tone of rapid apprehension, "that I did not want to go with him? because if you have, it was a great, great *mistake.*"

"I told him nothing of the kind," replies

Mr. Musgrave, looking, like me, fierce, but —unlike me—cool and pale. "I was not so inventive. I merely suggested that sunstroke would most likely be your portion if you went now, and that it would be quite as easy, and a great deal pleasanter, to go three hours later."

"Yes? and he said—what?"

"He was foolish enough to agree with me."

We are standing in a little quiet street, all shade and dark shops. There are very few passers-by. I feel rather ashamed of myself and my angry eyes peruse the pavement. Neither does he speak. Presently I look up at him rather shyly.

"How about the Gallery? the Pictures?"

"Do you wish to go there?" he asks, with rather the air of a polite martyr. "I shall be happy to take you if you like."

"Do!" say I, heartily, "and let us try to

be friends, and to spend five minutes without quarrelling!"

* * * * *

We have spent more than five, a great deal more—thirty, forty, perhaps, and our harmony is still unbroken, *uncracked* even. We have sat in awed and chastened silence before the divine meekness of the Sistine Madonna. We have turned away in disgust from Jordaens' brutish "Triumphs of Silenus," and tiresome repetitions of Hercules in drink. We have admired the exuberance of St. Mary of Egypt's locks, and irreverently compared them to the effects of Mrs. Allen's "World-wide Hair Restorer." We have observed that the forehead of Holbein's great Virgin is too high to please *us*, and made many other connoisseur-like remarks. I have pointed out to Mr. Musgrave the Saint Catherine which has a look of Barbara, and we have both grown rather tired of St. Sebastian, stuck as full of darts

as a pin-cushion of pins. Now we are sitting down resting our eyes and our strained powers of criticism, and have fallen into easy talk.

"I am glad you are coming to dine at our *table d'hôte* to-night," say I, in a friendly tone. "It will be nice for the General to have an Englishman to talk to. I hope you will sit by him, he has been so much used to men all his life that he must get rather sick of having nothing but the chatter of one woman to depend upon."

"At least he has no one but himself to blame for that," replies the young fellow, laughing. "I suppose it was his own doing."

"How do you know that?" cry I, gaily, and then the recollection of my hint to Sir Roger—a remembrance that always makes me rather hot—comes over me, and causes me to turn my head quickly away with a red blush. "It certainly *has* a look of

Barbara," I say, glancing towards the Saint Catherine, and rushing quickly into another subject.

"Has it?" he says, apparently unaware of the rapidity of my transition. "Then I wish I knew Barbara."

I laugh.

"I dare say you do."

"She is not much like you, I suppose?" he says, turning from the saint's straight and strict Greek profile to the engaging irregularity of mine.

"Not exactly," say I, with emphasis. "Ah!" (in a tone of prospective triumph), "wait till you see her!"

"I am afraid that I shall have to wait some time."

"The Brat—that is one of my brothers, you know—is the one like me," I say, becoming diffuse, as I always do when the theme of my family is started: "we *are* like! We can see it ourselves."

"Is he one of the thick-skinned six that you told me about?"

"There are *not* six," cry I, impatiently. "I do not know what put it into your head that there were *six;* there are only *three.*"

"You certainly told me there were six."

"I am *he* in petticoats," say I, resuming the thread of my own narrative; "everybody sees the likeness. One day when he was three or four years younger, we dressed him up in my things—my gown and bonnet, you know—and all the servants took him for me; they only found him out because he held up his gown so awkwardly high, and gave it such great kicks to keep it out of his way, that they saw his great nailed boots! Sir Roger thought we were twins the first time he saw us."

"Sir Roger!" repeats the young man, as if reminded by the name of something he

had meant to say. "Oh, by-the-by, if you will not think me impertinent for asking, where did you first fall in with Sir Roger? I should have thought that he was rather out of your beat; you do not hail from his part of the world, do you?"

"No," reply I, my thoughts travelling back to the day when we made toffee, and tumbled over each other, hot and sticky, to the window, to see the dogcart bearing the stranger roll up the drive. "I never saw him till this last March, when he came to stay with us."

"To stay with you?"

"Yes," reply I, thinking of our godless jokes about his wig and his false calves, and smiling gently to myself; "he was an old friend of father's."

"A contemporary, I suppose?" (a little inquisitively).

"Yes, he was at school with father," I answer; and the moment I have given

utterance to the abhorred formula I repent.

"At school with him?" (speaking rather slowly, and looking at me, with a sort of flickering smile in lips and eyes. "Oh, I see!"

"What do you see?" cry I, sharply.

"Nothing, nothing! I only meant to say I understand, I comprehend."

"There is nothing to understand," reply I, brusquely, and rising. "I am tired—I shall go home!"

We walk back rather silently; there is nothing so trying to eyes and mind as picture-seeing, and I am fagged, and also indefinitely, yet certainly, cross. As we reach the door of the Saxe, I hold out my hand.

"Now that we have come to the end of our walk," say I, "and that you cannot think that I am *hinting* to you, I will tell you that I think it was very ill-mannered and

selfish of you not to *insist* on carrying *this*" (holding out the brown paper parcel); "there is not *one* of the boys—not even Bobby, whom we always call so rough, who would have *dreamed* of letting a lady carry a parcel for herself, when he was by to take it. There! I am better now! I *had* to tell you; I wish you good-day!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"IF he does not like it," say I, setting it on the floor, and regarding it from a little distance, with my head on one side, while friendly criticism and admiration meet in happy wedlock in my eyes, "I can give it to you: I had much rather make you a present than *him*."

"Then Heaven grant that it may find disfavour in his sight!" says Sir Roger, piously.

We are talking of the travelling-bag, which at last, in despair of anything suitabler occurring to my mind, I have bought,

and now regard with a sort of apprehensive joy. The blinds are half-lowered for the heat, but through them, and under them, the broad gold sunshine is streaming and pushing itself, washing the careful twists of my flax hair, the bag's stout red leather sides, and Sir Roger's nose, as he leans over it, with manly distrust, trying the clasp by many searching snappings.

"I never gave you a present in my life —never—did I?" say I, squatting down on the floor beside him, crumpling my nice crisp muslin frock with the recklessness of a woman who knows that there are many more such frocks in the cupboard, and to whom this knowledge has but newly come; "never mind! next birthday I will give you one—a really nice, handsome, rather expensive one—all bought with your own money, too—there!"

This is on the morning of our last day in Dresden. Yes! *to-morrow* we set off

homewards. Our wedding-tour is nearly ended: tyrant custom, which sent us off, permits us to rejoin our fellows. Well, it really has not been so bad! I do not know that I should care to have it over again—that is, just immediately; but it has gone off very well altogether—quite as well as most other people's, I fancy. These are my thoughts in the afternoon, as (Sir Roger having gone to the post-office, and I having made myself very hot by superintending the packing of the presents—most of them of a brittle, *crackable* nature) I am leaning, to cool myself, over our balcony, and idly watching the little events that are happening under my nose. The omnibus stands, as usual, in the middle of the square, about to start for Blasewitz. Mysterious 'bus! always about to start—always full of patient passengers, and that yet was never seen by mortal man to set off. As I watch it with the

wondering admiration with which I have daily regarded it, I hear the door of our sitting-room open, and Vick give a little shrewish shrill bark, speedily changed into an apologetic and friendly whiffling and whoffling.

"Is that you?" cry I, holding on by the balcony, and leaning back to peep over my own shoulder into the interior. "Come out here, if it is."

"Sir Roger is out," I say, a second later, putting my hand into that of Mr. Musgrave (for it is he), as he comes stepping, in his usual unsmiling discontented beauty, to meet me.

"I know he is! I met him!"

"I am seeing the people start for Blasewitz for the last time! it makes me quite low!" I say, replacing my arms on the balcony, and speaking with an irrepressibly jovial broad smile on my face that rather contradicts my words.

"You *look* low," he answers, ironically, standing beside me, and looking rather provoked at my urbanity.

"This time to-morrow we shall be off," say I, beginning to laugh out of pure light-heartedness, though there is no joke within a mile of me, and to count on my fingers; "this time the day after to-morrow we shall be at Cologne—this time the day after *that* we shall be getting towards Brussels—this time the day after *that*, we shall be getting towards Dover—this time the day after *that*——"

"You will all be rushing higgledy-piggledy, helter-skelter, into each other's arms," interrupts my companion, looking at me with a lowering eye.

"Yes," say I, my eyes dancing. "You are quite right."

"Algy, and the Brat, and—what is the other fellow's name?—Dicky?—Jacky? Jemmy?——"

"Bobby," say I, correcting him. "But you are not quite right: the Brat will not be there!—worse luck—he is in Paris!"

"Well, Barbara will not be in Paris," says the young man, still in the same discontented, pettish voice. "*She* will be there, no doubt—well to the front—in the thickest of the osculations."

"*That* she will!" cry I, heartily. "But you must give up calling her Barbara; that is not at all pretty manners."

"We will make a bargain," he says, beginning to smile a little, but rather as if it were against his will and intention. "I will allow her to call me 'Frank,' if she will allow me to call her 'Barbara.'"

"I dare say you will" (laughing).

A little pause. Another person has got into the omnibus; it is growing extremely full.

"I *hate* last days," says my companion,

hitting viciously at the iron balcony rails with his stick, and scowling.

"'The Last Days of Pompeii,'" say I, stupidly, and yet laughing again; not because I think my witticism good, which no human being could do, but because I *must* laugh for very gladness. Another longer pause. (Shall I present the bag the night we arrive, or wait till next day?)

"I have got a riddle to ask you," says Frank, abruptly, and firing the observation off somewhat like a bombshell.

"Have you?" say I, absently. "I hope it is a good one."

"Of course *you* must judge of that—'Mon premier—'"

"It is in *French!*" cry I, with an accent of disgust.

"Well, why should not it be?" (rather tartly).

"No reason whatever, only that I warn you beforehand I shall not understand it:

I always *shiver* when people tell me a French anecdote; I never know when the point has arrived; I always laugh too soon or too late."

He says nothing, but looks black.

"Go on!" say I, laughing. "We will try, if you like."

"Mon—premier—est—le—premier—de tout," he says, pronouncing each word very separately and distinctly. "Do you understand *that?*"

I nod. "My first is the first of all—yes."

"Mon second n'a pas de second."

"My second has no second—yes."

"Mon tout"—(turning his long sleepy eyes sentimentally towards me)—"je ne saurai vous le dire."

"My whole—I cannot tell it you!—then why on earth did you ask me?" cry I, breaking out into hearty wholesome laughter.

Again he blackens.

"Well, have you guessed it?"

"Guessed it!" I echo, recovering my gravity. "Not I!—my first is the first of all—my second has no second—my whole, I cannot tell it you!—I do not believe it is a riddle at all! it is a hoax—a take in, like 'Why does a miller wear a white hat?'"

"It is nothing of the kind," he answers, looking thoroughly annoyed. "Must I tell you the answer?"

"I shall certainly never arrive at it by my unassisted genius," I reply, yawning. "Ah! there is M. Dorn going out riding! Alas! never again shall I see him mount that peacocking steed!"

"It is 'Adieu!'" says my companion, blurting it out in a rage, seeing that I *will* not be interested in or excited by it.

"*Adieu!*" repeat I, standing with my mouth wide open, looking perfectly blank. "*How?*"

"You do not see?" he says. (His face has grown scarlet.) "Well, you must excuse me for saying that you are rather——" He breaks off and begins again, very fast this time. "My first is the first of all—is not *A* the first letter in the alphabet? My second has no second—has God (*Dieu*) any second? My whole—I cannot say it to you—*Adieu!*"

The contrast between the sentimentality of the words, and the brusque and defiant anger of his tone, is so abrupt, that I am sorry to say I laugh again: indeed I retire from the balcony into the saloon inside, throw myself into a chair, and covering my face with my handkerchief, roar—

"It is very good," say I, in a choked voice; "very—so civil and pretty—but it is not very *funny*, is it?"

I receive no answer. I am still in my pocket-handkerchief, and he might be gone, but that I hear his quick, angry breathing, and

know, by instinct, that he is standing over me, looking like a handsome thunder-cloud. I dare not look up at him, lest another mad cachinnation such as sometimes overtakes one for the punishment of one's sins in church, should again lay violent hands upon me.

"I think I like 'Why was Balaam like a Life-Guardsman?' better *on the whole*," I say presently, peeping through my fingers, and speaking with a suspicious tremble in my voice.

"I have no doubt it is far superior," he answers, in a fierce and sulky tone that he in vain tries to make sound playful. "'*Balaam like a Life-Guardsman?*' and why was he, may I ask? Something humorous about his donkey, I suppose."

"Because he had a queer ass (cuirass)," reply I, again exploding, and hiding my face in the back of the chair.

"A *queer ass!*" (in a tone of the pro-

foundest contempt), "you have no more sentiment in you than *this table!*" smiting it with his bare hand.

"I know I have not," say I, sitting up and holding my hand to my side to ease the pain my excessive mirth has caused; "they always said so at home—oh, here is the General! we will make *him* umpire, which is funniest, yours or mine!"

Sir Roger enters, and glances in some surprise from Frank's crimson face to my convulsed one.

"Oh, General, do not we look as if we had been having an affecting parting?" cry I, jumping up and running to him. "Do not I look as if I had been crying? Quite the contrary, I assure you. Mr. Musgrave and I have been asking each other such amusing riddles—would you like to hear them? *Mine* is good, plain, vulgar English, but his is French, so we will begin with *it* —'*Mon premier*——'"

I stop suddenly, for Mr. Musgrave is looking at me with an expression simply *murderous.*

"Well, what are you stopping for? I am on the horns of expectation—'*Mon premier*——'"

"After all, it is not so funny as I thought," I answer brusquely. "I think we will keep it for some wet Sunday afternoon, when we are short of something to do."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE day of departure has really come. We have eaten our last "bif-teck *aux pommes frites*," and drank our last cup of coffee in the Saxe. I have had my last look at the familiar square, at the great dome of the Frauen Kirchen, at the high houses with their dormer windows, at the ugly big statue standing with its stiff black back rudely turned to the hotel, at the piled hay-carts. We are really and truly off. Our faces are set Barbara-wards, Bobby-wards, jackdaw-wards. I am in such rampaging spirits that I literally do not know what to do with myself. I feel

that I should like to tuck my tail, if I had one, between my legs, like Vick, and race round and round in an insane and unmeaning circle, as she does on the lawn at home, when oppressed by the overflow of her own gaiety.

It seems to me as if there never had been such a day. I look at the sky as we drive along to the station. Call it sapphire, turquoise—indeed! What dull stone that ever lived darkling in a mine is fit to be named even in metaphor with this pale yet brilliant arch, that so softly leans above us? It seems to me as if all the people we meet were handsome and well-featured —as if the Elbe were the noblest river that ever ran, carrying the sunlight in flakes of gold and diamond on its breast —as if all life were one long and kindly jest.

As we reach the station I see Mr. Musgrave standing on the pavement awaiting

us, with a sort of mixed and compound look on his face.

"Here is Mr. Musgrave, come to see us off!" I cry, jocundly. "Come to say '*Adieu!*' ha! ha! I must not forget to ask him whether he has any more riddles!"

"For heaven's sake do not!" cries Sir Roger, smiling in spite of himself, yet seriously and earnestly desirous of checking my wit. "Let the poor boy have a little peace! He no more understands chaff than I understand Parsee."

I hop out of the carriage like a parched pea, scorning equally the step and Frank's hand extended to help me. I feel to-day as if I need only stand on tip-toe, and stretch out my arms in order to be able to fly.

"So you have come to see the last of us," I say, trying to pull a long face, and walking with him into the waiting-room.

"Yes; rather a mistake, is not it?" he says, somewhat gloomily, but loading him-

self at once, with ostentatious haste (in memory of my former reproof), with my bag, parasol, and novel.

"The day after—the day after—the day after to-morrow," say I, smiling cheerfully up in his dismal face. "You may fancy us just turning in at the park gates—by-the-by, have you any message to send to the boys, to Barbara?"

"None to the boys," he answers, half smiling too. "I hate boys: you may give my love to Barbara if you like, and if you are quite sure that she is like the St. Catherine."

"Wait till you see her," say I, oracularly.

"But when *shall* I see her?" he asks, roused into an eagerness, which I think promises admirably for Barbara; "when are you coming home, really?"

"Keep a good look-out at your lodge," I say gaily, "and you will no doubt see us arrive some fine day, looking very foolish,

most probably—crawling along like snails, dragged by our tenants."

"Were you *ever* known to answer a plain question plainly since you were born?" he cries, petulantly. "When are you likely to come *really*?"

"'I know not! What avails to know?'" reply I, pompously spouting a line out of some forgotten poem, that has lurked in my memory, and now struts out, to the anger and discomfiture of Mr. Musgrave.

"Ah! here are the doors opening!"

Everybody pours out on to the platform, and into the empty and expectant train.

Sir Roger and I get into a carriage—*not* a *coupé* this time, and dispose our myriad parcels above our heads, under our feet. Trucks roll, and porters bawl past; luggage is violently shot into vans. The last belated panting passenger has got in. The doors are slammed to. Off we go! The train is already in motion, when the young

man jumps on the step and thrusts in his hand for one parting shake.

"*Mon tout*," say I, screwing up my face into a crying shape, and speaking in a squeaky pseudo-tearful voice, "*je ne saurai vous le dire !*"

Then he is hustled off by an indignant guard and three porters, and we see him no more. I throw myself back into my corner, laughing.

"General," say I, "I think your young friend is nearly as soft-hearted as the girl in Tennyson who was

"'Tender over drowning flies.'

He looked as if he were going to *weep*, did not he ? and what on earth about ?"

CHAPTER XV.

"How mother, when we used to stun
Her head wi' all our noisy fun,
Did wish us all a-gone from home;
But now that some be dead and some
Be gone, and all the place is dumb,
How she do wish wi' useless tears
To have again about her ears—
The voices that be gone!"

WE have passed Cologne: have passed Brussels: have passed Calais and Dover: have passed London: we are drawing near home. How refreshing sounds the broad Doric of the porters at Dover. Squeamish as I am, after an hour and three-quarters of a nice short chopping sea, the sight of the dear

green fustian jackets, instead of the slovenly blue blouses across Channel, goes nigh to revive me. Adieu, oh neatly aquiline, broad-shaved French faces! Welcome, O bearded Britons, with your rough-hewn noses!

To avoid the heat of the day we go down from London by a late afternoon train. It is evening when, almost *before* the train has stopped, I insist on jumping out at our station. Imagine if through some accident we were carried on to the next by mistake!

Such a thing has never happened in the annals of history, but still it *might.*

Sir Roger has some considerable difficulty in hindering me from shaking hands with the whole staff of officials. One veteran porter who has been here ever since I was born, has a polite but improbable trick of addressing *every* female passenger as "my lady." Well, with regard

to *me*, at least, he is right now. I *am* "my lady!" Ha! ha! I have not nearly got over the ridiculousness of this fact yet, though I have been in possession of it now these *four* whole weeks.

It has been a hot, parching summer day, and now that the night draws on, all the flagging flowers in the cottage borders are straightening themselves anew, and lifting their strengthened leaves to the dews. The pale bean-flowers, in the broad bean-fields, as we pass, send their delicate scent over the hedge to me, as if it were some fair and courteous speech. To me it seems as if they were saying, as plainly as may be, "Welcome home, Nancy!"

The sky that has been all of one hue during the live-long day—wherever you looked, nothing but pale, *pale* azure—is now like the palette of some God-painter, splashed and freaked with all manner of great and noble colours—a most regal blaze

of gold—wide plains of crimson, as if all heaven were flashing at some high thought — little feathery cloud islands of tenderest rose-pink. We are coming very near now. There, down below, set round its lips with tall rushes, is our pool, all blood-red in the sunset! Can *that* be colourless water—that great carmine fire? —there are our elms with their heads in the sunset too.

"General," say I, very softly, putting my hand through his arm, and speaking in a small tone of unutterable content, "I should like to kiss everybody in the world."

"Perhaps you would not mind beginning with *me*," returns he gaily: then—for I look quite capable of it—glancing slightly over his shoulder at the vigilant couple in the dickey.

"No, I did not mean *really*."

We are trotting alongside of the park pal-

ing. I stand up and try to catch a glimpse between the coachman and footman, of the gate, to see whether they have come to meet me.

We are slackening our speed; we are going to turn in; the lodge-keeper runs out to open the gate; but no, it is needless. It is already open. I could have told *her* that. Here they all are!—Barbara, Algy, Bobby, Tou Tou.

"Here they are!" cry I, in a fidgety rapture. "Oh, General, just look how Tou Tou has grown; her frock is nearly up to her knees!"

"Do you think she *can* have grown that much in four weeks?" asks he, not contradictiously, but a little *doubtfully*, as Don Quixote may have asked the Princess Micomicona her reasons for landing at Ossime. "But pray, madam," says he, "why did your ladyship land at Ossime, seeing that it is not a seaport town?"

"I suppose not," I reply, a little disappointed. "I suppose that her frock must have run up in the washing."

To this day I have not the faintest idea how I got out of the carriage. My impression is that I *flew* over the side with wings which came to my aid in that one emergency, and then for evermore disappeared.

I do not know *this* time *where* I begin, or whom I end with. I seemed to be kissing them *all* at once. All their arms seem to be round *my* neck, and mine round all of theirs at the same moment. The only wonder is that at the end of our greetings, we have a feature left amongst us. When at length they are ended,

"Well," say I, stupidly, with a long sigh of content, staring from one countenance to another, with a broad grin on my own. "Well!" and though I have been away *four* weeks, and been to foreign parts, and

dined at table d'hôtes, and seen Crucifixions and Madonnas, and seem to have more to tell than could be crowded into a closely packed twelvemonths of talk, this is all I can find to say.

"Well," reply they, nor do they seem to be much richer in conversation than I.

Bobby is the first to regain the use of his tongue. He says, "My eye!" (oh, dear and familiar expletive, for a whole calendar month I have not heard you!) "My eye! what a swell you are!"

Meanwhile Sir Roger stands aloof. If he *ever* thought of himself he might be reasonably and equitably huffy at being so entirely neglected, for I will do them the justice to say that I think they have all utterly forgotten his existence; but as he never does, I suppose he is not; at least there is only a friendly entertainment, and no hurt dignity in the gentle strength of his face.

In the exuberance of my happiness, I have given him free leave to kiss Barbara and Tou Tou, but the poor man does not seem to be likely to have the chance.

"Are not you going to speak to the General!" I say, nudging Barbara. "You have never said 'How do you do?' to him."

Thus admonished, they recover their presence of mind, and turn to salute him. There are no kissings, however, only some rather formal hand shakings; and then Algy, as being possessed of the nearest approach to manners of the family, walks on with him. The other three adhere to me.

"Well," say I, for the third time, holding Barbara by one hand, and resting the other on Bobby's stout arm, dressed in cricketing flannel, while Tou Tou *backs* before us with easy grace. "Well, and how is everybody? How is mother?"

"She is all right!"

"And HE? Is anybody in disgrace now? At least of course *somebody* is, but *who?*"

"*In disgrace!*" cries Bobby, briskly. "Bless your heart, no! we are

> "'Like the young lambs,
> A sporting about by the side of their dams.'

In disgrace, indeed! we are 'Barbara, child,' and 'Algy, my dear fellow,' and 'Bobby, love.'"

"*Bobby!*" cries Tou Tou, in a high key of indignation at this monstrously palpable instance of unveracity, and nearly capsizing, as she speaks, into a rabbit hole, which, in her backward progress—we are crossing the park—she has not perceived.

"Well," replies Bobby, candidly, "that last yarn may not be *quite* a fact, I own *that*, but I appeal to *you*, Barbara, is not it true *in the main?* Are not we all 'good fellows,' and 'dear boys?'"

"I am thankful to say that we are," re-

plies Barbara, laughing; "but how long we shall remain so is quite another thing."

"I have brought a present for him," say I, rather nervously; "do you think he will be pleased?"

"He will say that he very much regrets that you should have taken the trouble to waste your money upon *him*, as he did last birthday, when we exerted ourselves to lay out ten shillings and sixpence on that spectacle case," answers Bobby, cheerfully.

"But what is it?"

"What is it?" cry Barbara and Tou Tou in a breath.

"It is a—a *travelling-bag*," reply I, with a little hesitation, looking imploringly from Barbara to Bobby. "Do you think he will like it?"

"A *travelling-bag!*" echoes Bobby; then, a little bluntly, "But he never travels!"

"No more he does!" reply I, feeling a

good deal crestfallen. "I thought of that myself; it was not quite my own idea—it was the General's suggestion!"

"The General!" says Bobby, "whew—w!" (with a long whistle of intelligence); "well, *he* ought to know what he likes and dislikes, ought not he? He ought to understand his tastes, being the same age, and having been at schoo—"

"Look!" cry I, hastily, breaking into the midst of these revolting facts, which are daily becoming more distasteful to me, and pointing to the windows of the house, which are all blazing in the sunset, each pane sending forth a sheaf of fire, as if some great and mighty feast were being held within. "I see you are having an illumination in honour of us."

"Yes," answers Bobby, kindly entering into my humour, "and the reason why father did not come to meet you at the gate was that he was busy lighting the candles."

My spirits are so dashed by the more implied than expressed disapproval of my brethren, that I resolve to defer the presentation of the bag till to-morrow, or perhaps—to-morrow being Sunday, always rather a dark day in the paternal calendar—till Monday.

Dinner is over, and as it is clearly impossible to stay indoors on such a night, we are all out again. The three elders—father, mother, and husband, sitting sedately on three rustic chairs on the dry gravel walk; and we young ones lying about in different attitudes of restful ease, on rugs and cloaks that we have spread upon the dewy grass. We are not far off from the others, but just so far as that our talk should be out of earshot. In my own mind, I am well aware that Sir Roger would far rather be with *us*, listening to our quick gabble, and laughing with us at our threadbare jests, which are rewarded with mirth

so disproportioned to their size, than interchanging sober talk with the friend of his infancy. Once or twice I see his gray eyes straying a little wistfully towards us, but he makes no slightest movement towards joining us. I should like, if I had my own way, to ask him to come to us, to ask him to sit on the rugs and make jokes too, but some sort of false shame, some sneaky shyness before the boys, hinders me. I am leaning my elbow on the soft fur of the rug, and my head on my hand, and am staring up at the stars, cool and throbbing, so like little stiletto holes pricked in heaven's floor, as they steal out in systems and constellations on the night.

"There is dear old Charles Wain," say I, affectionately; "I never knew where to look for him in Dresden; *how* nice it is to be home again!"

"Nancy!" says Algy, gravely, "do you know I have counted, and that is the *six-*

teenth time that you have made that ejaculation since your arrival! Do you know—I am sorry to have to say it—that it sounds as if you had not enjoyed your honeymoon very much?"

"It sounds quite wrong, then," cry I, coming down from the stars, and speaking rather sharply. "I enjoyed it immensely; yes, *immensely!*"

I say this with an emphasis which is calculated to convince not only everybody else, but even myself.

"Come now," cries Bobby, who is farthest off from me, and to remedy this disadvantage begins to travel quickly in a sitting posture along the rugs towards me, "tell the truth—*gospel* truth, mind!—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Would you like to be setting off on it over again to-morrow morning?"

"Of course not," reply I, angrily, "what

a silly question! Would *any one* like to begin *anything* over again, just the very minute that they had finished it? You might as well ask me would I like to have dinner over again, and begin upon a fresh plate of soup."

No one is convinced.

"When *I* marry," continues Bobby, lying flat on his back, with his hands clasped under his head (we all laugh)—"when *I* marry, no one shall succeed in packing *me* off to foreign parts, with my young woman. I shall take her straight home, as if I was not ashamed of her, and we will have a *dance*, and make a clean sweep of our own cake!"

"Nancy!" cries Tou Tou, innocently, joining in the conversation for the first time, "*did* any one take him for your *grandfather*, as the Brat said they would?"

"Of course not!" cry I, crossly, making a spiteful lunge as I speak at a *startle-de-*

buz, which has lumbered booming into my face. "Who on earth supposed they would *really* ?"

Tou Tou collapses, with a hazy impression of having been snubbed, and there is a moment's silence. A faint, fire-like flush still lingers in the west—all that is left of the dazzling pageant that the heavens sent to welcome me home. I am looking towards it—away from my brothers and sisters — away from everybody — across the indistinct garden-beds — across the misty park, and the dark tree-tops, when a voice suddenly brings me back.

"Nancy, child!" it says, "is not it rather damp for you? Would you mind putting *this* on?"

I look up in a hurry, and see Sir Roger stooping over me, with an outspread cloak in his hands.

"Oh, thank you!" cry I, hurriedly, reddening—I do not quite know why—and

with that same sort of sneaky feeling, as if the boys were laughing; "I am not one much apt to catch cold—none of us are—but I will, if you like."

So saying, I draw it round my shoulders. Then he goes, *in a minute*, without a second's lingering, back to the gravel-walk, to his wicker chair, to grave, dry talk, to the friend of his infancy! I have an uncomfortable feeling that there is a silent and hidden laugh among the family.

"Barbara, my treasure!" says Algy, presently, in a mocking voice. "*Might* I be allowed to offer you an umbrella, and a pair of goloshes, to defend you from the evening dews?"

"Hush!" cries Barbara, gently pushing his away, and stretching out her hand to me. She is the only one that understands. (Oh, why, *why* did I ever laugh at him, with them? What is there to laugh at in him?)

"My poor Barbara!" continues Algy, in a tone of affected solicitude. "If you had not a tender brother to look after you, your young limbs might be cramped with rheumatism, and twitched with palsy, before any one would think of bringing *you* a cloak."

"Wait a bit!" say I, recovering my good-humour with an effort, reflecting that it is no use to be vexed—that they *mean* nothing—and that, lastly, *I have brought it on myself!*

"Wait for *what?*" asks Barbara, laughing. "Till Toothless Jack has grown used to his new teeth?"

"By-the-by," cries Bobby, eagerly, "that was since you went away, Nancy: he has set up a stock of *new* teeth—*beauties*—like orient pearl—he wore them in church last Sunday for the first time. We tell Barbara that he has bought them on purpose to propose in.

Now, do not you think it looks *promising?*"

"We do not mean, however," says Algy, lighting a cigar, "to let Barbara go *cheap!* Now that we have disposed of you so advantageously, we are beginning to be rather ambitious even for *Tou Tou.*"

"We think," says Bobby, giving a friendly, but severe pull to our youngest sister's outspread yellow locks, "that Tou Tou would adorn the *Church.* Bishops have mostly *thin* legs, so it is to be presumed that they admire them: we destine Tou Tou for a bishop's lady!"

Hereupon follows a lively fire of argument between Bobby and his sister; she protesting that she will *not* espouse a bishop, and he asseverating that she shall. It lasts the best part of a quarter of an hour, and ends by reducing Tou-Tou to tears.

"But, come," says Algy, taking his cigar

out of his mouth, throwing his head back, and blowing two columns of smoke out of his nose, "let us take up our subject again where we dropped it. I should be really glad if I could get you to own that you and *he*"—(indicating my husband by a jerk of his head)—"grew rather sick of each other! Whether you own it or not, I know you *did;* and it would give me pleasure to hear it. You need not take it personally. I assure you that it is no slur upon him—*everybody* does. I have talked to lots of fellows who have gone through it, and they all say the same."

"Nancy!" says Bobby, abandoning, at length, his persecution of Tou Tou, and pretending not to hear her last persevering assertion of her determination not to be episcopally wed; "tell the truth, and shame the devil. It would be different if we were strangers, but *we* that have sported with you since you wore frilled trousers

and a bib—come now—did you, or did you not, kneel three times a day, like the prophet Daniel, looking eastwards or westwards, or whichever way it *did* look, and yearn for us, and Jacky, and the bun-loaf —come now?"

"Well, yes," say I, reluctantly making the admission. "I do not say that I did not! Of course, after having been used to you all my life, it would have been very odd if I had not missed you rather badly; but that is a very different thing from being *sick of him!*"

"Well, we will not say *sick*," returns Algy, with the air of one who is making a handsome concession; "it is a disagreeable, bilious expression, but it would be useless to try and convince me that *any* human affection could stand the wear and tear of twenty-eight whole days of an absolute duet and not be rather the worse for it!"

"But it was *not* an absolute duet," cry I,

raising my voice a little, and speaking with some excitement; "you are talking about what you do not know! you are quite wrong."

"Well, it is not the first time in my life that I have been that," he says, philosophically; "but come—who did you the Christian office of interrupting it? tell us."

"I told you in my letters," say I, rather petulantly. "I certainly mentioned—yes, I know I did—we happened at Dresden to fall in with a friend of the General's—at least, a person he knew."

"A person he knew? What kind of a person? Man or woman?"

"Man."

"Old or young?"

"Young."

"Ugly or pretty?"

"Pretty," answer I, laughing. "Ah! what a rage he would be in, if he could hear such an epithet applied to him!"

"A young, well-looking, man-friend!" says Algy, slowly recapitulating all my admissions as he lies gently puffing on the rug beside me. "Well?"

"*Well!*" echo I, rather snappishly. "Nothing! only that I wanted to show you that it was not quite such a *duet* as you imagined! Of course—Dresden is not a big place—of course we met very often, and went here and there together."

"And where was Sir Roger meanwhile?"

"Sir Roger was there, too, of course," reply I, still a little crossly, "except once or twice—certainly not more than twice—he said he did not feel inclined to come, and so we went without him."

"You left him at home, in fact!" says Algy, with a rather malicious smile, "out of harm's way, while you and the young friend marauded about the town together;

it must have been very lively for him, poor man! Oh, fie! Nancy, fie!"

"We did not do anything of the kind," cry I, now thoroughly vexed and uncomfortable. "I wish you would not misunderstand things on purpose! there is not any fun in it! *Both* times I *wanted* him to come! I *asked* him particularly!"

"And, if I may make so bold as to inquire," asks Bobby, striking in, "how did the young friend call himself? What was his name?"

"Musgrave," reply I, shortly. "Frank Musgrave!" for the stream of my conversation seems dried.

"Was he *nice?* Should *we* like him?" asks Tou Tou, who has recovered her equanimity, dried her tears, and forgotten the bishop.

"He was nice *to look at!*" reply I, cautiously.

"That is a very different thing!" says

Barbara, laughing. "But was he nice in himself?"

I reflect.

"No," say I, "I do not think he was: at least, he wanted a great deal of alteration."

"As I have no doubt that you told him," says Algy, with a smile.

"I dare say I did," reply I, distantly, for I am not pleased with Algy.

A little pause.

"I think he *was* nice, too, *in a way*," say I, rather compunctiously. "I used to tell him about all of you, and—I dare say it was pretence—but he *seemed* to like to hear about you! When I came away, he sent his love to Barbara: he would not send any messages to you boys—he said he hated boys!"

"Humph."

Another short silence. The elders have gone in to tea. Through the win-

dows, I see the lamp-light shining on the tea-cups.

"Algy!" say I, in a rather low voice, edging a little nearer to where he lies gracefully outspread. "You did not mean it, *really?* You do not think I—I—I—*neglected* the General, do you?—you do not think I—I—*liked* to be away from him?"

"My lady!" replies he, teasingly, "I *think* nothing! I only know what your ladyship was good enough to tell me!"

Then we all get up, shoulder our rugs, and walk in.

CHAPTER XVI.

WELL, no one will deny that Sunday comes after Saturday; and it was Saturday evening when the heavens painted themselves with fire, and the sun lit up all the house windows to welcome us home. Sunday is not usually one of our blandest days, but we must hope for the best.

"General," say I, standing before him, dressed for morning church, after having previously turned slowly round on the point of my toes, to favour him with the back view of as delightful a bonnet, and as airily fresh and fine a muslin gown as ever

young woman said her prayers in—" by-the-by, do you like my calling you General ?"

" At least I understand who you mean by it," he says, a little evasively ; " which, after all, is the great thing, is not it ?"

" It is my own invention," say I, rather proudly ; " nobody put it into my head, and nobody else calls you by it, do they ?"

" Not now."

" *Not now ?*" cry I, surprised ; " but did they ever ?"

" Yes," he says, " for about a year, most people did ; I was general a year before my brother died."

" *Your brother died ?*" cry I, again repeating his words, and arching my eyebrows, which have not naturally the slightest tendency towards describing a semi-circle. " What ! *you* had a brother, too, had you ? I never knew that before."

" Did you think *you* had a monopoly of them ?" laughing a little.

"So you were not 'Sir' always?"

"No more than *you* are," he answers, smiling. "No, I was not born in the purple: for thirty-seven years of my life I earned my own bread—and rather dry bread too."

"You do not say so!" cry I, in some astonishment.

"If I had come here seven years ago," he says, taking both my pale yellow hands in his light gray ones, and looking at me with eyes which seem darker and deeper than usual under the shade of the brim of his tall hat—"by-the-by, you would have been a little girl then—as little as Tou Tou——"

"Yes," interrupt I, breaking in hastily; "but, indeed, I never was a bit like her, never. I *never* had such legs—ask the boys if I had!"

"I did not suppose that you had," he answers, bursting into a hearty and most unfeigned laugh; "but" (growing grave

again), "Nancy, suppose that I had come here then! I should have had no shooting to offer the boys—no horses to mount Algy—no house worth asking Barbara to—"

"No more you would!" say I, too much impressed with surprise at this new light on Sir Roger's past life to notice the sort of wistfulness and inquiry that lurks in his last words; then, after a second, perceiving it, "And you think," say I, loosing my hands from his, and growing as pink as the delicate China rose-bud that is peeping round the corner of the trellis in at the window, "that there would not have been as much inducement *then* for me to propose to you, as there was in the present state of things!"

I am laughing awkwardly as I speak; then eagerly changing the conversation, and rushing into another subject, "By-the-by, I had something to say to you—something quite important—before we digressed."

"Yes?"

"Oh, General!" taking hold of the lapel of his coat, and looking up at him with appealing earnestness, "do you know that I have made up my mind to give *him* the *bag* to-day! it is no use putting off the evil day —it *must* come, after supper—they all say *after supper!*"

"Yes?"

"Well, I want you to talk to him *all day*, and get him into a good humour by then, if you can, that is all!"

"*That is all!*" repeats my husband, with the slightest possible ironical accent. Then we go to church. It is too near to drive, so we all walk. The churchyard elms are out in fullest leaf above our heads. There are so many leaves, and they are so close together, that they hide the great brown rooks' nests. They do not hide the rooks themselves. It would take a good deal to do that. Dear pleasant-spoken rooks talk-

ing so loudly and irreverently about their own secular themes—out-cawing the church bells, as we pace by, devout and smart, to our prayers. Last time I walked up this path, it was hidden with red cloth, and flowers were tumbling under my feet. Ah! red cloth comes but once in a life-time. It is only the queen who lives in an atmosphere of red cloth and cut flowers.

We are in church now. The service is in progress. Can it be only *five* Sundays ago that I was standing here as I am now, watching all the little well-known incidents? Father standing up in frock-coat and spectacles, keeping a sharp look-out over the top of his Prayer-book, to see *how* late the servants are. The ill-behaved charity boys emulously trying who shall make the hind legs of his chair squeak the loudest on the stone floor. Toothless Jack leering distantly at Barbara from the side aisle. Something apparently is amusing him. He is smiling a

little. I see his teeth. They, at least, are new. *They* were not here five weeks ago. The little starved curate—the one who tore his gloves into strips—loses his place in the second lesson, and madly plunges at three different wrong verses in succession, before he regains the thread of his narrative.

We have come to the sermon. The text is, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." No sooner is it given out than Algy, Bobby, and Tou Tou all look at me and grin; but father, who has a wily way of establishing himself in the corner of the pew, so as to have a bird's-eye view of all our demeanours, speedily frowns them down into a preternatural gravity. Ah, why *to-day*, of all days, did they laugh? and why *to-day*, of all days, did the servants file noisily in, numerous and out of breath, in the middle of the psalms? I tremble when I think of the bag.

Well, who will may laugh again now:

we are out in the sunshine, with the churchyard grass bowing and swaying in the wind, and the little cloud shadows flying across the half-effaced names of the forgotten dead, who lie under their lichen-grown tombs.

"Did you see his *teeth?*" asks Tou Tou, joining me with a leap, almost before I am outside the church porch.

"They are not comfortable yet," remarks Bobby, gravely, as he walks beside me carrying my Prayer-book. "I could see that: he was taking them out, and putting them in again with his tongue all through the Litany."

"When once he has secured Barbara, I expect that they will go back with the box for good and all—eh, Barbara?" say I, laughing, as I speak; but Barbara is out of ear-shot. She is lingering behind to shake hands with the curate, and ask all the poor old people after their diseases. *I*

never can recollect clearly *who* has *what*. I always apportion the rheumatism wrongly, but *she* never does. There she stands just by the church gate, with the little sunny lights running up and down upon her snow-white gown, shaking each grimy old hand with a kind and friendly equality.

The day rolls by; afternoon service; walk round the grounds; early dinner (we always embitter our lives on Sundays by dining at *six*, which does the servants no good, and sours the tempers of the whole family); then prayers. Prayers are always immediately followed by that light refection which we call supper.

As the time approaches, my heart sinks perceptibly lower in my system than the place where it usually resides.

> "Be ready, Sister Nancy,
> For the time is drawing nigh,"

says Algy, solemnly, putting his arm round

my shoulders, as the prayer-bell having rung, we set off for the wonted justicing-room.

"Have a pull at my flask," suggests Bobby, seriously; "there is some cognac left in it since the day we fished the pool. It would do you all the good in the world, and if you took *enough*, you would feel able to give him *ten* bags, or, indeed, throw them at his head at a pinch."

"Have you got it?" say I, faintly, to the General, who at this moment joins us.

"Yes, here it is."

"But what will you do with it *meanwhile?*" cry I, anxiously; "he must not see it *first.*"

"Sit upon it," suggests Algy, flippantly.

"Hang it round his neck while he is at prayers," bursts out Bobby, with the air of a person who has had an illumination; "you know he always pretends to have his eyes shut."

"And at 'Amen,' he would awake to find himself famous," says Algy, pseudo-pompously.

But this suggestion, although I cannot help looking upon it as ingenious, I do not adopt.

Prayers on Sunday are a much *finer* and larger ceremonial than they are on week-days. In the first place, instead of a few of the church prayers quickly pattered, which are ended in five minutes, we have a whole long sermon, which lasts twenty. In the second place, the congregation is so much greater. On week-days it is only the in-door servants; on Sundays it is the whole staff—coachman, grooms, stable-men. I think myself that it is more in the nature of a *parade*, to ensure that none of the establishment are out *sweethearting*, than of a religious exercise. Usually I am delighted when the sermon is ended. Even Barrow or Jeremy Taylor would sound dull

and stale if fired off in a flat, fierce monotone, without emphasis or modulation. To-night, at every page that turns, my heart declines lower and lower down. It is ended now; so is the short prayer that follows it. We all rise, and father stands with his hawk eyes fixed on the servants, as they march out, *counting* them. The upper servants are all right; so are the housemaids, cookmaids, and lesser scullions. Alas! alas! there is a helper wanting.

Having listened to, and *dis*believed the explanation of his absence, father leads the way into supper, but the little incident has taken the bloom off his suavity.

Sir Roger has deposited the bag—still wrapped in its paper coverings—on a chair, in a modest and unobtrusive corner of the dining-room, ready for presentation. He did this just before prayers. As we enter the room, father's eyes fall on it.

"What is *that?*" he cries, pointing with his forefinger, and turning severely to the boys. "How many times have I told you that I will not have parcels left about, littering the whole place? Off with it!"

"If you please, father," say I, in a very small and starved voice, "it is not the boys', it is *mine.*"

"*Yours*, is it?" with a sudden change of tone, and return to amenity. "Oh, all right!" (Then, with a little accent of sudden jocosity)—"One of your foreign purchases, eh?"

We sit round the snowy table, in the pleasant light of the shaded lamps, eating chicken salad, and abasing and rifling the great red pyramids of strawberries and raspberries, but talking not much. We young ones never *can* talk out loud before father. He has never heard our voices raised much above a whisper. I do not think he has an idea what fine, loud, Bil-

lingsgate voices his children *really* have. He has said grace—we always have a longer, *gratefuller* grace than usual on Sundays—and has risen to go.

"Now for it!" cries Bobby, wildly excited, and giving me an awful dig in the ribs with his elbow.

"Shall I get it?" asks the General, in an encouraging whisper. "Cheer up, Nancy! do not look so *white!* it is all right."

He rises and fetches it, slips it quickly out of its coverings and puts it into my hand. Father has reached the door, I run after him.

"Father!" cry I, in a choked and trembling voice—"stop!"

He turns with the handle in his grasp, and looks at me in some surprise.

"Father!" cry I, beginning again, and holding my gift out nervously towards him, "here's—here's—here's a *bag!*"

This is my address of presentation. I

hear the boys tittering at the table behind me—a sound which, telling me how ill I am speeding, makes my confusion ten-fold worse. I murmur helplessly, and indistinctly, something about his never travelling, and my knowing that fact—and having been always sure that he would hate it—and then I glance helplessly round with a wild idea of flight. But at the same moment an arm of friendly strength comes round my shoulders—a friendly voice sounds in my buzzing ears.

"James," it says, simply and directly, "she has brought you a present, and she is afraid that you will not care about it."

"A *present!*" echoes my father, the meaning of the inexplicable object which has suddenly been thrust into his grasp beginning to dawn upon him. "Oh, I see! I am sure, my dear Nancy"—with a sort of embarrassed stiffness that yet means to be gracious—"that I am extremely obliged

to you, extremely; and though I regret that you should have wasted your money on me, yet—yet—I assure you, I shall always prize it very highly."

Then he goes out rather hastily. I return to the supper-table.

"Shake hands!" cries Algy, pouring me out a glass of claret. "*Now*, perhaps, you have some faint idea of what *I* felt when I had to return thanks for the bridesmaids."

"Nancy!" cries Bobby, holding out the fruit to which he alludes, and speaking in a wobbly, quivering voice, with a painfully *literal* imitation of my late address, "here's —here's—here's a *peach!*"

But I am burying my face in Sir Roger's shoulder, like a shy child.

"I *like* you!" I say, creeping up quite close to him. "You were the only one that came to help me. If it had not been for *you*, I should be there still!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE bag affair is quite an old one now—a fortnight old. The bag itself has, I believe, retired into the decent privacy of a cupboard, nor is it much more likely to re-issue thence than was one of the frail nuns built into the wall in the old times likely to come stepping out again. Bobby has at length ceased to offer me every object which it devolves upon him to hand me, with a quavering voice and a prolonged stammer, since, though I was at first excellently vulnerable by this weapon of offence, I am now becoming *hornily* hard and indifferent to it. We have

stepped over the boundaries of June into July.

Yes, June is gone to look for all its dead brothers, wherever—since they say nothing is ever really lost—they lie with their stored sweets. To me this has been as merry and good a June as any one of my nineteen.

Sir Roger is beginning to talk of going home—*his* home, that is—but rather diffidently and tentatively, as if not quite sure whether the proposal will meet with favour in my eyes. He need not be nervous on this point. I, too, am rather anxious and eager to see my house—*my* house, if you please!—I who have never hitherto possessed any larger residence than a doll's house, whose whole front wall opened at once, giving one an improbably simultaneous view of kitchen-range, best four-poster and drawing-room chairs. I have, it is true, seen photographs of my new

house, photographs of its east front, of its west front—photographs, in its park, of the great old cedar; in its gardens, of its woody pool—but, to tell you the truth, I want to see *it*. I have already planned a house-warming and invited them all to it, a house-warming in which—oh, absurd!—*I* shall sit at the head of the table, and father and mother only at the sides—*I* shall tell the people who they are to take in to dinner, and nod my head from the top when dessert is ended.

To-day I am going to write and secure the Brat's company—that is, later in the day—but now it is quite, *quite* early, even the letters have not come in. We have all—viz., the boys, the girls, and I—risen (in pursuance of a plan made overnight) preternaturally early, almost as early as I did on my wedding morning, and are going out to gather mushrooms in the meadow by the river. Indignation against

the inhabitants of the neighbouring town is what has torn us from our morning dreams, the greedy townsfolk, by whom, on every previous occasion, we have found our meadow rifled before we could reach it. To-day we shall at least meet them on equal terms. We are all rather gapy at first, more especially Algy, who has deferred the making of the greater part of his toilette till his return, looks dishevelled, and sounds grumbling. But before long both gapes and grumbles depart.

Who would see the day when he is old and stale and shabby, when, like us, they could come out to meet him as he walks across the meadow with a mantle of dew wrapped round him, and a garland of paling rose-clouds, that an hour ago were crimson, about his head ?

The place towards which we tend is at some little distance, and our road thither leads through all manner of comely rustic

places, flowered fields, where the butter-cups crowd their little varnished cups, and the vigilant oxeyes are already wakefully staring up from among the grass-spears; a little wood; a deep and ruddy-coloured lane, along whose unpruned hedges straggle the riches of the wild rose, most delicately flushed, as if God in passing had called her very good, and she had reddened at His praise; where the honey-suckle, too, is holding stilly aloft the open cream-coloured trumpets, and closed red trumpet-buds, of her heaven-sweet crown.

In an instant Tou Tou is scrawling and scrambling like a great spider up the steep bank: in an instant more she is tugging, tearing, devastating; while the faint petals that no mightiest king can restore, but that any infant with a touch can destroy, are showering in scented ruin around her. It gives me a pain to see it, as if I saw some sentient thing in agony. I think I feel, with Walter Savage Landor—

"I never pluck the rose; the violet's head
Hath shaken with my breath upon its bank
And not reproached me: the ever sacred cup
Of the pure lily hath between my hands
Felt safe, unsoil'd, nor lost one grain of gold."

"You will have your basket filled before we get there," I say remonstrating, but she does not heed me. Hot and scratched—at least I am glad that in their death-pain they were able to scratch her—she still tugs and mauls. I walk on. We reach the meadow. Well, at least *to-day* we are in time. It has the silence and solitude of the dawn; of Creation's first still day, broken only by the sheep that are cropping

"The slant grass, and daisies pale."

The slow smooth river washes by, sucking in among the rushes. Our footsteps show plainly shaped, as we step along through the hoary dew. We separate—going one this way, one that—and in silence and gravity, pace with bent heads and down-turned eyes through the fine

short grass. Excitement and emulation keep us dumb, for let who will—blasé and used up—deny it, but there is an excitement wholesome and hearty in *seeking*, and a joy pure and unadulterated in finding, mushrooms in a probable field in the hopeful morning; whether the mushroom be a patriarch whose gills are browned with age, and who is big enough to be an umbrella for the fairy people, or a little milk-white button, half hidden in daisies and trefoil. Sometimes a cry of rage and anguish bursts from one or other of us, who has been the dupe of a puff-ball family, and who is satiating his or her revenge by stamping on the deceiver's head, and reducing its fair round proportions to a flat and fleshy pulp. We search long and diligently, and our efforts are blessed with an unwonted success. By the time that the sun has attained height enough in the heavens to make his power tyrannically

felt, our baskets are filled. Tou Tou has to throw away her wild roses, limp and flaccid, into the dust of the lane. We walk home, singing, and making poor jokes, as is our wont. As we draw near the house with joyful foretastes of breakfast in our minds, with redly flushed cheeks, and merry eyes, I see Sir Roger leaning on the stone balustrade of the terrace, looking as if he were watching for us, and indeed, no sooner does he catch sight of us, than he comes towards us.

"Do you like mushrooms?" cry I, at the top of my voice, long before I have reached him, holding up my basket triumphantly. "See, I have got the most of anybody, except Tou Tou!"

I have met him by the end of this sentence.

"Do you like mushrooms?" I repeat, lifting the lid, and giving him a peep into the creamy and pink-coloured treasures inside,

"oh, you *must!* if you do not, I shall have a *divorce!* I could not bear a difference of opinion upon such a subject."

I have never given him time to speak, and now I look up with appealing laughter into his silent face.

"Why, what is the matter?" I cry, with an abrupt change of tone. "What has happened? How odd you look!"

"Nothing has happened," he answers, trying to smile, but I see that it is quite against the grain, "only that I have had some not very pleasant news."

"It is not anything about—about the *Brat!*" cry I, stopping suddenly, seizing his arm with both hands, and turning, as I feel, extremely pale, while my thoughts fly to the only one of my beloveds that is out of my sight.

"About the *Brat!*" he echoes in surprise, "oh, dear no! nothing!"

"Then I do not much care *who* is dead?"

I answer, unfeelingly, drawing a long breath, "he is the only person *out* of this house whose death would afflict me much, and I do not think that there is any one beside *us* that *you* are very devoted to, is there?"

"Why are you so determined that some one is *dead?*" he asks, smiling again, but this time, a little more naturally; "is there nothing vexatious in the world but *death?*"

"Yes," say I, laughing despite myself, as my thoughts revert to my late employment, "there are *puff-balls!*"—then, ashamed of having been flippant, and afraid of having been unsympathetic, I add hastily, "I wish you would tell me what it is! I am sure, *when I hear*, I shall be vexed too; but you see as long as I do not know what it is, I cannot, can I?"

"There is no time now," he says, glancing towards father, whose head appears through the dining-room windows. "See! they are going to breakfast!—afterwards I

will tell you—afterwards—and child—" (putting his hands on my shoulders, and essaying to look at me with an altogether cheered and careless face, "do not you worry your head about it! eat your breakfast with an easy mind; after all, it is nothing very bad!—it could not be anything *very* bad, as long as——." He stops abruptly, and adds hastily, "Let us have a look at your mushrooms! well, you *have* a quantity!"

"Yes, have not I?" say I triumphantly, "more than any of them, except Tou Tou ——" then, not quite satisfied with the impression our late talk has left upon mé, "General!" say I, lowering my face and reddening, "I hope you do not think that I am *quite* a baby because I like childish things —gathering mushrooms—running about with the boys—talking to Jacky. I can understand serious things *too*, I assure you. I think I could enter into your trouble—

I think, if you gave me the chance, that you would find that I could!"

Then a sort of idiotic false shame overtakes me, and without waiting for his answer, I disappear.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I MEET Bobby retiring to the kitchen to cook his mushrooms himself. He invites me to join him, but I refuse. It is the first time in the annals of history that I was ever known to say no to such an offer. Bobby regards me with reproachful anger, and makes a muffled remark, the drift of which I understand to be, that though I may *pretend* not to be, I *am* grown fine, as he always said I should. To-day it seems to me as if breakfast would *never* end. It is one of our fixed laws that no one shall leave the table until father gives the signal

by saying grace. Sometimes, when he is in one of his unfortunate moods, he keeps us all staring at our empty cups and platters for half an hour. To-day I watch with warm anxiety the progress downwards of the tea in his cup. At last he has come to the grounds. He lays down the *Times.* We all joyfully half bow our heads, in expectation of the wonted "For what we have received, &c.," but speedily and disappointedly raise them again.

"Jane, can you spare me another cup?" and re-buries himself in a long leader. Behind the shelter of the great sheet, I make a hideous contortion across the table at Sir Roger, who has fallen with great docility into our ways, and is looking back at me now with that gentle steadfast serenity which is the leading characteristic of his face, but which this morning is, I cannot help thinking, a good deal disturbed, hard as he is trying to hide it. There are,

thank Heaven, no more false starts. Next time that he lays down the paper, we are all afraid to bend our heads, for fear that the movement shall break the charm, and induce him to send for a fourth cup—he has already had *three*—but no! release has come at last.

"For what we have received the Lord make us truly thankful!"

Almost before we have reached "thankful," there is a noise of several chairs pushed back. Before you could say "Knife!" we are all out of the room. All but Sir Roger! In deference, I suppose, to the feelings of the friend of his infancy, and not to appear *too* anxious to leave him—Sir Roger ought to have married Barbara, they two are always thinking of other people's feelings—he delays a little, and indeed they emerge together and find me sitting on one of the uncomfortable stiff hall chairs, on which

nobody ever sits. To my dismay, I hear father say something about the chestnut colt's legs, and I know that another delay is in store for me. Sir Roger comes over to me, and takes his wide-awake from the stand beside me.

"We are going to the stables," he says, patting my shoulder.

I make a second hideous face. Often have I been complimented by the boys, on the flexibility of my features.

"I shall be back in ten minutes," he says in a low voice; "will you wait for me in the morning-room?"

"I suppose I must," say I, reluctantly, with a disgusted and disappointed drawing down of the corners of my mouth.

Ten minutes pass; twenty, five-and-twenty! Still he has not come back. I walk up and down the room; I look out of window at the gardeners rolling the grass; I rend a large and comely rose into tatters,

while all manner of unpleasant possibilities stalk along in order before my mind's eye. Perhaps Tempest is burnt down. Perhaps some bank, in which he has put all his money, has broken. Perhaps he has found out that his brother is not *really* dead after all! I dismiss this last *worst* suggestion as improbable. The door opens, and he enters.

"Here you are!" I cry, making a joyous rush at him. "I thought you were never coming! Please is *that* your idea of ten minutes?"

"I could not help it," he answers; "he kept me talking; I could not get away any sooner."

"Why did you go?" say I, dutifully. "Why did not you say, when he asked you, 'No, I will not?' He would have done it to you as soon as look at you."

"That would have been so polite to one's host and father-in-law, would not it?" he

answers, a little ironically. "After all, Nancy, where is the use of vexing people for nothing?"

"Not *people* generally," reply I, still chafed; "but I *should* like some one who was not his child, and in whom it would not be disrespectful, to pay him out for keeping us all as he did this morning; he knew as well as possible that we were dying to be off; *that* was why he had that last cup: he did not *want* it any more than I did. He did not drink it; did not you see? he left three-quarters of it."

Sir Roger does not answer, unless a slight shrug and a passing his hand across his face with a rather dispirited gesture be an answer. I feel ashamed of my petulance.

"Do you feel inclined to tell me about your ill news?" I say, gently, going over to him and putting my hand on his shoulder.

"I have been making so many guesses as to what it can be?"

"Have you?" he says, looking up. "I dare say. Well, I will tell you. Do you remember—I dare say you do not—my once mentioning to you that I had some property in the West Indies—in Antigua?"

I nod.

"To be sure I do; I recollect I had not an idea where Antigua was, and I looked out for it at once in Tou Tou's atlas."

"Well, a fortnight—three weeks ago—it was when we were in Dresden, I had a letter telling me of the death of my agent out there. I knew nothing about him personally—had never seen him—but he had long been in my poor brother's employment, and was very highly thought of by him."

"*Poor* brother!" think I; "well, thank Heaven! at least *he* has not revived; he would not be 'poor' if he had," but I

say only, "Yes?" with a delicately interrogative accent.

"And to-day comes this letter"—(pulling one out of his pocket)—telling me that now that his affairs have been looked into, they are found to be in the greatest confusion—that he has died bankrupt, in fact; and not only *that*, but that he has been cheating me right and left for years and years, appropriating the money which ought to have been spent on the estate to his own uses, and, as misfortunes never come single, I also hear"—(unfolding the sheet, and glancing rather disconsolately over it)—"that there has been a hurricane, which has destroyed nearly all the sugar-canes."

The thought of *Job* and his successive misfortunes instantly occurs to me—the Sabæans, the Chaldæans, the great wind from the wilderness—but being a little doubtful as to his example having a very

consoling effect, with some difficulty, and at the cost of a great pressure exercised on myself, I abstain from mentioning him.

"To make a long story short," continues Sir Roger, "and not to bother you with unnecessary details——"

"But indeed they would not bother me," interrupt I, eagerly, putting my hand through his arm, and turning my face anxiously up to him; "I should *enjoy* hearing them. I wish you would not think that all sensible, sober things *bother* me."

"My dear," he says, gently pinching my cheek, "I think nothing of the kind, but I know that not all the explanations in the world will alter the result, which is, that I shall not get a farthing from the property *this* year, and very likely not *next* either."

"You do not say so!" cry I, trying to impart a tragic tone to my voice, and only hoping that my face *looks* more distressed and aghast than it feels.

To tell you the truth, I am mightily relieved. At this period of my history, money troubles seem to me the lightest and airiest of all afflictions. I have sat down, and Sir Roger is walking up and down, with a restlessness unlike his usual repose; on his face there is a vexed and thwarted look, that is unfamiliar to me. The old parrot sits in the sun, outside his cage, scratching his head, and chuckling to himself. Tou Tou's voice comes ringing from the garden. It has a tone of mingled laughter and pain, which tells me that she is undergoing severe aud searching discipline at the hands of Bobby.

"I suppose," say I, presently, speaking with some diffidence, "that *that* is *all*. Of course I do not mean to say that it is not very bad, but there is nothing *worse?*"

"Is not it *bad enough?*" he asks, half laughing. "What did you expect?"

"You know," say I, still hesitatingly, "I

have not an idea *how* well off you are; I mean, how much a year you have. Mercenary as I am"—(laughing nervously)—"I never thought of asking you; but I suppose, even if the earth were to open and swallow Antigua—even if there were no such things as West Indies—we should still have money enough to buy us bread and cheese, should not we?"

"Well, it is to be hoped so," he answers, a gleam of amusement flashing like a little sunshiny arrow across his vexation; "it would be a bad look out for you and me, would not it, considering the size of our appetites, if we should not?"

A little pause. Tou Tou's voice again. The anguish has conquered the laughter, and is now mixed with a shrill treble wrath. Polly is alternately barking like Vick, and laughing with a quiet amusement at his own performance.

"Do you think," say I, still airing my

opinion with timidity, as one that has no great opinion of their worth, "that it does one much good to be rich beyond a certain point?—that a large establishment, for instance, gives one much pleasure? I am sure it does not in *our* case; if you were to know the number of nails that the servants and their iniquities have knocked into mother's coffin—yes, and father's, too."

"Have they?" (a little absently). He is still pacing up and down restlessly—to and fro—along and across—he that is usually so innocent of fidget or fuss. "Nancy," he says, half seriously, half in rueful jest, "if you want a thing done, do it yourself: mind that, all your life. I am a standing instance of the disadvantage of having let other people do it for me. The fact is, I ought to have gone out there long ago, to look after things myself."

"If you *had* been there, you could not have stopped the hurricane coming, any more than Canute could stop the waves," say I, filching a piece of history from "Little Arthur," and pushing it to the front.

He smiles.

"Not the hurricane—no; but the hurricane was the lesser evil. I might have done something to avert, or, at least, lessen the greater one. To tell the truth, I meant to have gone out there this spring—had, indeed, almost fixed upon a day for starting, when—*you* stopped me."

"*I!*"

"Yes," he says, pausing in his walk in front of me, and looking at me with a face full of sunshine, content, and laughter; a face whence hurricanes, West Indies, and agents have altogether fled, "you called me a '*beast*,' and the expression startled me so much—I suppose from not being used to it

and the East ones too, clean out of my head."

"I hope," say I, anxiously, "that you will never tell any one that I said *that.* They would think that I was in the habit of calling people '*beasts*,' and indeed—*indeed*, I very seldom use so strong a word, *even* to Bobby."

"Well," he says, not heeding my request, not, I am sure, hearing it, and resuming his walk, "what is done cannot be undone, so there is no use whining about it, Nancy" (again stopping before me, and this time taking my face in his two hands). "Will you mind much, or will you not?—do you ever mind *anything much*, I wonder?" (eagerly and wistfully scanning my face, as if trying to read my character through the mask of my pale skin, and small and unremarkable features). "Well, there is no help for it—as I did not go then I must go now."

"Go!" repeat I, panting in horrid surprise, "go where?—to Antigua?"

"Yes, to Antigua."

No need now to dress my voice in the tones of factitious tragedy—no need to lengthen my face artificially. It feels all of a sudden quite a yard and a half long. Polly has stopped barking: he is now calling, "Barb'ra! Barb'ra!" in father's voice, and he hits off the pompous severity of his tone with such awful accuracy, that did not my eyes assure me to the contrary, I could swear that my parent was in the room.

After a moment I rise, throw my arms round Sir Roger, and lay my head on his breast—a most unwonted caress on my part, for we are not a couple by any means given to endearments.

"Do not go!" I say in a coaxing whisper, "do nothing of the kind!—stay at home!"

"And will *you* go instead of me?" he

asks with a gentle irony, stroking, the while, my plaits as delicately as if he were afraid that they would *come off*, which indeed, *indeed* they would not.

"By myself," say I, laughing, but not raising my head. "Oh! of course; nothing I should like better, and I should be so invaluable in mending the sugar canes, and keeping the new agent on his P's and Q's, should not I?"

He laughs.

"Stay!" say I, again whispering, as being more persuasive; "where would be the use of going *now?* It would be shutting the stable door after the steed was stolen, and—" (this in a still lower voice)—"we are beginning to get on so nicely too."

"Beginning!" he echoes, with a half melancholy smile, "only *beginning?* have not we always got on nicely?"

"And if we are poorer," continue I, insinuatingly, "I believe we shall get on

more ill. I am sure that your people are better of one another than rich ones—they have less to distract them from each other."

I have now raised my head and perceive that Sir Roger does not look very much convinced.

"But granting that poverty *is* better than riches, do you believe that it *is*, Nancy?—for my part I doubt it—for myself I will own to you that I have found it pleasant not to be obliged to look at sixpence upon both sides; but *that*," he says with straightforward simplicity, "is perhaps because I have not long been used to it—because once, long ago, I wanted money badly—I would have given my right hand for it, and could not get it!"

"What did you want it for?" cry I, curiously, pricking my ears, and for a moment forgetting my private troubles in the hope of a forthcoming anecdote.

"Ah! would not you like to know?" he says playfully, but he does not explain: instead, he goes on, "Even granting that it is so, do you think it would be very manly to let a fine estate run to ruin because one was too lazy to look after it? Do you think it would be quite *honest*—quite fair to those that will come after us?"

"*Those that will come after us!*" cry I, scornfully, making a face for the third and last time this morning. "And who are they, pray? Some sixteenth cousin of yours, I suppose?"

"Nancy," he says, gravely, but in a tone whose gentleness takes all harshness from the words, "you are talking nonsense, and you know as well as I do that you are!"

Then I know that I may as well be silent. After a pause:

"And when," say I, in as lamentable a voice as King Darius sent down among

the lions in search of Daniel—"how soon, I mean, are we to set off?"

"*We!*" he cries, a sudden light springing into his eyes, and an accent of keen pleasure into his voice. "Do you mean to say that *you* thought of coming too?"

I look up in surprise.

"Do not wives generally go with their husbands?"

"But would you *like* to come?" he asks, seizing my hands, and pressing them with such unconscious eagerness, that my wedding-ring makes a red print in its neighbour finger.

Oh, friends, I wish to Heaven that I had told a lie. It would have been, I am sure, one of the cases in which a lie would have been justifiable—nay, praiseworthy, too. But, standing there, under the truth of his eyes, I have to be true, too.

"Like!" say I, evasively, casting down my eyes, and fiddling uneasily with one of

the buttons of his coat, "it is hardly a question of '*Like*,' is it? I do not imagine that you *like* it much yourself?—one cannot always be thinking of what one likes."

The pressure of his fingers on mine slackens; and though, thanks to my wedding-ring, it was painful, I am sorry. After a minute:

"But you have not," say I, trying to speak in a tone of light and airy cheerfulness, "answered my question yet—how soon we must set off? You know what a woman always thinks of first—her *clothes*, and I must be seeing to my packing."

"The sooner the better," he answers, with a pre-occupied look. "Not later than ten days hence!"

"*Ten days!*"

Again my jaw falls. He has altogether loosed my hands now, and resumed his walk. I sit down by the table, lean my elbows on it, and push my fingers through

my hair in most dejected musing. Polly has been dressing himself; turning his head over his shoulder, and arranging his feathers with his aquiline nose. He has finished now, and has just given vent, in a matter-of-fact, unemotional voice, to an awful oath! There is the sound of brisk feet on the sunny gravel outside. Bobby's face looks in at the window—broad, sunburnt, and laughing.

"Well! what is up now?" cries he, catching a glimpse of my disconsolate attitude. "You look as if the fungi had disagreed with you!"

"Then appearances are deceitful," reply I, trying to be merry, "for they have not."

He has only glanced in upon us in passing: he is gone again now. I re-bury my hands in my locks, which, instead of a highly-cultivated garden, I am rapidly making into a wilderness.

"I suppose," say I, in a tone which fitly

matches the length of my face, "that Bobby will have got a ship before I come back: I hope they will not send him to any very unhealthy station—Hong-Kong, or the Gold Coast."

"I hope not."

"What port shall we sail from?"

"Southampton."

"And how long—about how long will the voyage be?"

"About seventeen days to Antigua."

"And how long"—(still in the same wretched and resignedly-melancholy voice)—"shall we have to stay there?"

"It depends upon the state in which I find things."

A good long pause. My elbows are growing quite painful, from the length of time during which they have been digging into the hard marqueterie table, and my hair is as wild as a red Indian's. *Ten* days! ten little galloping days, and then

seventeen long, slow, monstrous ones! *Seventeen* days at sea! seventeen days and seventeen nights, too—do not let us forget that—of that deadly nausea, of that unspeakable sinking of all one's inside to the very depths of creation—of the smell of boiling oil, and the hot, sick, throbbing of engines!

"I hope," say I, in a voice so small that I hardly recognise it for my own, "that I shall not be *quite* as ill all the way as I was crossing from Calais to Dover; and the steward," continue I, in miserable meditation, "kept telling me all the while what a fine passage we were having, too!"

"So we were!"

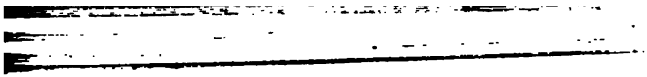
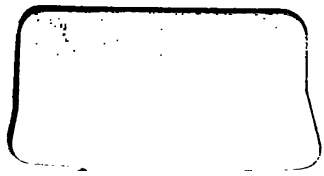
Another pause. I am still thinking of the horrid theme; living over again my nearly-forgotten agonies.

"Do you remember," say I, presently, "hearing about that Lady Somebody—I forget her name—but she was the wife of

one Governor-General of India, and she always suffered so much from sea-sickness, that she thought she should suffer less in a sailing-vessel, and so returned from India in one, and just as she came in sight of the shores of England, *She Died!*"

As I reach this awful climax, I open my eyes very wide, and sink my voice to a tragic depth.

"The moral is—" says Sir Roger, stopping beside me, laying his hand on my chair-back, and regarding me with a mixture of pain and diversion in his eyes, "Stick to Steam!"

END OF VOL. I.

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